

Iglesia Ni CRISTO

A Study
in Independent
Church
dynamics

by ARTHUR LEONARD TUGGY



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Arthur Leonard Tuggy

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Arthur Leonard Tuggy

INTRODUCTION

Independent churches have sprung into vigorous life in many, if not all, countries in the Third World. One of the largest, wealthiest, and most powerful of these is the rapidly growing *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the Philippines. The purpose of this study is to describe in detail this Filipino church as a truly indigenous, though at some points sub-Christian in the author's opinion, and to understand the dynamics of its life and growth with a view to drawing out implications for other churches working in similar environments.

Church growth study is yet a young discipline and most, if not all, of the in-depth studies made up to now have been of churches which most Christians would consider as essentially orthodox, or at least in some sense, "within the fold." In recent years special attention has been focused on the amazing growth of Pentecostal churches around the world, particularly in Latin America. But it may now be helpful to take a good look at a church that is very different from the type usually studied. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* places no emphasis on charismatic experiences. It is considered heretical by nearly all other churches in its country. It does not hesitate to use the "fleshly" weapons of sarcasm, political influence, and physical force in its struggle to gain a place in national life. And it has grown by leaps and bounds to a place where it now rivals in size the entire Protestant community in the Philippines.

Many questions will rise as we study this church and its growth. Has it grown, as one missionary put it to me once, because it has the Devil on its side? (What does that do to our doctrine of the Holy Spirit?) Or are there reasons for its growth from which we all may learn? How really "Filipino" is it? How "New Testament" is it? Is

this a unique Philippine phenomenon or is it related to what is happening in other parts of the world? The purpose of this research is to attempt to answer these and similar questions.

This study is both *diachronic* (that is, through time in history), and *synchronic* (studying the church as it is at one period of time, the present). As accurately as possible from the sources available, I have told the story of the founding and early growth of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* under the dynamic leadership of the late Felix Manalo. But the primary focus of this investigation is on the church today—its present doctrine, organization, life, ministry, and methods of propagation, under its present head, Eraño Manalo.

This study does not purport to be a complete history of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Such a history should properly be written by someone in the church who has access to all of the church's records and knows the personnel and the activities of the church intimately. This research is rather an in-depth study of the growth of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* seen in historical perspective by a sympathetic outsider.

Neither is this an anthropological research project, though it is informed by insights gained by the use of anthropological concepts and research tools.

Nor is this book a theological or exegetical investigation, though the major themes of the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* teachings will be analyzed. It is not our purpose to refute *Iglesia* doctrine, though the differences between some of its teachings and orthodox Christian doctrine will be pointed out. We are primarily interested in tracing the historical development of *Iglesia* teaching and finding the historical antecedents of its distinctive emphases.

This book was first produced as a doctoral dissertation at the School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary. In the course of the investigation, I drew on the methodologies of three academic disciplines: history, anthropology, and church growth research.

The methodology of historical research as explained by such historiographers as Barzun and Graff (1957), Renier (1950), Block (1964), and Weiss (1962) is employed. The principles of continuity and of the uniqueness of history are assumed. We assume that every historical event has its causes; it never originates out of nothing. And, at least, some of these causes and effects can be discovered by ordering historical events in their proper sequence. Causation, imagination and understanding of human nature will help us link together events in such a way as to shed light on what has actually taken place in history (Renier, 1950:205). We believe that the **Present** and the **Past** are interrelated and that one helps us understand the other (Block, 1964:39-47). We also have not despaired of giving any explanation because all of the minute details of every occurrence are not known. As Weiss says, "When he (the historian) wants to know the where, when, why and how, it is always with respect of macroscopic occurrences" (1962:33).

The canons of verification of evidence have been followed as far as our sources allow. These include matching copies with sources, checking one source against another, weighing the relative value of different sources of information, disentangling confusing assembling of facts (Barzun and Graff, 1957:88ff).

A limiting factor in this research is the almost impenetrable security curtain which the *Iglesia ni Cristo* administration has dropped over its inner workings. The

Japanese political science scholar, Hirofumi Ando, stated, "Microdata concerning this church is not available" (1969: 335). But the macrodata which is available has enabled us to reconstruct the story of this church with sufficient accuracy to make many valid conclusions about its life and growth.

Anthropological research methods are needed to understand the part which the *Iglesia ni Cristo* plays in the lives of its members. The church must be seen in its social and cultural environment. The influence of this environment on the church, as well as its influence on the environment, has been studied. Many detailed studies have been conducted and many fine monographs written about different aspects of Philippine culture and society. We have drawn heavily on this fund of information, joining with it our own set of observations about Filipino life in general and *Iglesia ni Cristo* life in particular.

Church growth researches usually begin with a careful analysis of the facts of growth of which the graph of growth is one. This graph is constructed from the year by year communicant member statistics of the church under investigation. This kind of information is not given out by the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, though it may well have it in its own records. We have drawn approximating graphs based upon the best available estimates of its membership through the years. This helps us see general trends in its growth history. But a detailed year-by-year analysis was impossible.

Church growth theory is not only interested in the facts of growth. It is also vitally concerned with discovering the dynamics of growth. The "why" of church growth is important. It is not enough to know "how much." The many factors which have led to the growth or decline of a

church during its history need to be uncovered. It is the study of these factors, as well as the bare facts of growth, that gives us insight into the actual dynamics of church growth.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has not grown equally well in all areas of the Philippines. The facts about regional growth were investigated, and some conclusions were made regarding the dynamics of its growth in various areas. Facts regarding the growth of this church in certain homogeneous units of Philippine society were especially instructive.

A special feature of this investigation is the use of new tools still in the process of development to attempt to measure the indigeneity of a church. Or, to be more specific, we tried to measure the "dynamic equivalence" of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* and the Christian Church in New Testament times. I hope this will be a solid contribution to the further development of the new discipline of ethnotheology as it is being worked through by such men as Dr. Charles H. Kraft.

In reconstructing the history of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, I leaned quite heavily on the official history of the church published in the July 27, 1964, 50th Anniversary edition of the *Pasugo* magazine along with the detailed histories in Tagalog of each district of the church in the same issue. Two Roman Catholic scholars have also done extensive investigations on this subject. One of these, a Jesuit priest, takes a very negative stance against the *Iglesia*, but the other, a graduate student at the time (1955) at the University of Manila, wrote a thesis which is remarkably sympathetic and thorough. Most of the popular and scholarly writings on the *Iglesia ni Cristo* since that time have been based primarily on Mrs. Sta. Romana's research.

The library facilities of the University of California at Los Angeles, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and St. Andrew's Seminary in Manila have been used in gathering all available scholarly writings on the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

Scholarly research must be based on careful and critical investigation of available primary sources. All *Iglesia ni Cristo* documents at the Securities and Exchange Commission, Manila, were studied. The importance of this bit of investigation is shown by the fact that the revised articles of incorporation dated March, 1948 and quoted in other studies were, in fact, withdrawn by the church in September, 1952 "on account of certain material discrepancies."

Interviews were held with both present and former members of the church, both officials and ordinary members. I regret that I was not granted an interview by the present head of the *Iglesia*. Especially enlightening was the interview with two older members of the church. One of these men joined the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in 1915, one year after its founding, soon rose to a prominent place of leadership, and retained that position until he left the church in 1952. I found this man helpful in answering not only the question, "What did Manalo do?" but also, "Why?" His testimony was balanced, of course, against other evidence. I received information about Felix Manalo's relationship with the Seventh Day Adventists from two retired Adventist missionaries who were in places of leadership in that church when Manalo was their worker. I also followed up some leads in the United States about the early history of this church, particularly the relationship between Manalo and Professor Bruce Kershner, an early Church of Christ missionary to the Philippines.

My doctrinal investigations were based primarily on a detailed analysis of their book, *Isang Paghubunyag sa*

Iglesia ni Cristo, which may be freely translated as "An Exposition of the Teachings of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*." Along with this I investigated many articles in the *Pasugo* magazine spanning many years. I was particularly interested in noting any change of emphasis or doctrinal development over the years. The *Pasugo* ("God's Message") magazine is the *Iglesia's* primary instrument of indoctrination. I have attempted to check on the accuracy of my doctrinal analysis of their teachings by sending a copy of chapter five to its headquarters, inviting them to respond in writing.

I also studied its hymnbook to see if any recurring themes in hymns would give any insight into its world-view or self-image.

I have attended services in several locations in the Philippines and in the United States and have complete notes of sermons heard. I also have eyewitness descriptions and tape recordings of *Iglesia ni Cristo* public debates and rallies. I believe that I am one of the few Americans who have attended an *Iglesia ni Cristo* featuring fiery Felix Manalo himself and understood his scathing attack in Tagalog on his religious opponents.

In the course of living and working in the Philippines for many years, I have had numerous personal encounters with *Iglesia ni Cristo* ministers, deacons, and members.

I have conducted this investigation from an evangelical Christian perspective, but I have tried to deal fairly and sympathetically with this organization whose beliefs differ so drastically from my own.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABWE	Association of Baptists for World Evangelism
C & MA	Christian and Missionary Alliance
IEMELIF	<i>La Iglesia Evangelica Methodista en las Islas Filipinas</i>
IFI	<i>La Iglesia Filipina Independiente</i>
INC	<i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i>
KMP	<i>Kapisanang Maligayang Pagtatagumpay</i>
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
UCCP	United Church of Christ in the Philippines

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	vii
ABBREVIATIONS	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	xix
1. ITS SETTING	1
The Philippines at the Turn of the Century	
Historical Situation	
Social and Cultural Situation	
Religious Situation	
The Philippines Today	
Present Social, Political Situation	
Present Religious Situation	
The Place of the <i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i> in	
Philippine Life Today	
2. ITS FOUNDER	17
Family Background and Childhood	
Manalo's Spiritual Odyssey	
First Steps	
The <i>Colorum</i> Religions	
The Methodist Episcopal Church	
The Presbyterian Church	
The Christian Mission (<i>Mision Cristiana</i>)	
The Seventh Day Adventist Church	
3. ITS BEGINNING AND EARLY HISTORY ----	37
Beginnings (1913-1922)	
Felix Manalo Crosses His	
Rubicon (November, 1913)	
Early Days and Church Organization	
First Outreaches: Rizal, Manila	
Beginnings in Bulacan Province and	
Central Luzon	
Manalo's First Trip to the United States (1919)	
Return and Trouble in the Church	
(Ora Rebellion): 1920-1922	

Development of "God's Messenger"	
Doctrines (1922)	
Accelerated Growth 1923-1945	
Expansion in Central Luzon	
Expansion into Southern Luzon	
Expansion into Northern Luzon: 1938	
Beginnings in Central Visayas, Cebu: 1937	
Felix Manalo's Second United States Trip: 1938	
The Founding of Pasugo Magazine	
The Second World War	
4. LATER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT -----	69
Rapid Growth Period: 1945-1964	
Philippine-wide Expansion	
Intense Conflict with Other Churches	
Building of Cathedral-Chapels	
Riding the Crest	
Death of Felix Manalo	
Consolidation Period 1963-1973	
Eraño Manalo Leads the Church	
Growth as a Political Force	
Present Situation Under Martial Law	
Foreign Missions	
5. ITS DOCTRINE AND HERMENEUTICS -----	105
What the Iglesia ni Cristo Believes	
About God	
About the Bible	
About Jesus Christ	
About the Church	
About Felix Manalo: The Sugo Doctrine	
About the Way of Salvation	
About the Christian Life	
How It Interprets the Bible	
Is the Bible Its Only Rule of Faith and Practice?	
Its Proof-text Approach	
Its Tendential Approach	
Misunderstandings Due to Ambiguous	
Translations in the Tagalog Bible	
Doctrinal Antecedents	
Disciples of Christ Antecedents	
Seventh Day Adventist Antecedents	
Is the <i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i> Doctrinally Reformable?	

6. ITS ORGANIZATION, STRUCTURE, AND MINISTRY -----	141
Its Organizational Structure	
Charismatic Authority and Its Routinization	
Organizational Structure	
"Interior" versus "Exterior" Government	
The Ministry	
Recruitment	
Training	
Support	
Functions	
7. ITS LIFE, ETHOS, AND INDIGENEITY -----	165
Its Life and Ethos	
Description of a Regular Worship Service	
Members' Participation in Church Organizations	
"Compounds" and Barrio Maligaya	
Finances and Giving	
The <i>Iglesia</i> Ethos Seen in Its Hymnody	
Its Indigeneity	
What is an Indigenous Church?	
How Do We Measure Dynamic	
Equivalence Churchness?	
The <i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i> Case Study	
8. ITS METHODS OF PROPAGATION AND RHETORIC -----	201
Methods of Propagation	
Public Debates	
Open Forums and House Meetings	
Indoctrination Classes for Prospective Members	
Its Rhetoric	
Principles of Propagation	
The Principle of Extensive Propagation	
The Principle of Intensive Propagation	
Mobilization for Propagation	
Results: The <i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i> Graph of Growth	
9. ITS SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS WITH OTHER THIRD WORLD INDEPENDENT CHURCHES -----	225
The World-Wide Independent Church Phenomenon	

Classifying Churches: From Troeltsch to Barrett	
Generalizing Barrett	
Similarities With Other Independent Churches	
Reaction to Mission	
Independence and Separatism	
Charismatic Leadership	
Distinctive Doctrinal Position and Bible Legitimation	
Indigeneity and Cultural Adaptation	
Conservatism	
Rapid Growth	
Contrasts with Other Independent Churches	
Pan Tribal Character	
Political Involvement	
Central Place of the Bible—No "Inner Light"	
Lack of Emphasis on Spirits and Supernatural Manifestations	
10. ITS FUTURE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER CHURCHES	247
Why Has It Grown?	
Historical Factors	
Sociological Factors	
Methodological Factors	
Religious Factors	
Will It Continue to Grow in the Future?	
Lessons For Other Churches	
Stereotypes Shattered	
Lessons in Methodology	
Oversimplifications Questioned	
A Lesson in Motivation	
A Personal Evaluation	
THE AUTHOR	265
BIBLIOGRAPHY	267

FIGURES

1. Map of the Philippines Showing Directions of Early <i>Iglesia</i> Growth	49
2. Map of the Philippines Showing Directions of Post-War <i>Iglesia</i> Growth	70
3. Comparison Graph: Post-War Philippine Church Growth	88
4. Bar Graph of <i>Iglesia</i> Growth: 1922-1970	99
5. Organizational Chart: 1914	147
6. Organizational Chart: 1974	150
7. Dynamic Equivalence Churchness Diagram	191
8. Measuring Dynamic Equivalence Churchness Scale I: Extent of Use of Surrounding Cultural Patterns	193
9. Scale II: Vitality of Function and Relevance of Meaning	195
10. Scale III: Point of Reference	196
11. Scale IV: Christian Authenticity	198
12. Summary Scale	193
13. <i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i> Graph of Growth (Absolute)	221
14. <i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i> Graph of Growth (Logarithmic)	222

TABLES

1. <i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i> Growth: 1914-1922	59
2. Comparative Growth Statistics: Post World War II	87
3. Tentative Scale of Religious Tension	230



A sharply spired, distinctively designed Iglesia ni Cristo chapel rises above most buildings and dominates the Manila skyline.

CHAPTER 1

ITS SETTING

Looking from a jet-liner's window, taking off over the city of Manila, gracefully tall office buildings along Ayala Avenue in Makati contrast with hundreds of **barong-barong** shacks built along the canals and waterways of this tropical metropolis. Scattered over the spreading city, sharply spired, distinctively designed, cathedrals rise above most buildings and dominate the Manila skyline. These are the "chapels"¹ of the rapidly growing *Iglesia ni Cristo*, the subject of this book.

This solidly Filipino Church was founded by Felix Manalo in 1913. It grew slowly at first, but increased its growth rate steadily, until in the years immediately after the Second World War it exploded all over the Philippines. But before we tell the story of this growth and analyze the factors producing it, we want to describe briefly but accurately the historical and social setting in which this story takes place. The fact that churches grow in a specific context, and that this historical-socio-cultural context influences its growth is now axiomatic in church growth studies. Seeing the church in its setting is the first step in understanding its dynamics. Let us take this first step by turning the calendar back to the first and second decades of this century in the Philippines.

The Philippines at the Turn of the Century

Historical Situation

The year 1898 marked the second great turning point in Philippine history, religious as well as political. The

¹ In *Iglesia ni Cristo* terminology, the word "church" never refers to a building, but may denote either the entire organization or an individual member. It calls all of its church buildings "chapels," whether they are large or small.

cannons of Admiral Dewey's fleet on May 1st of that year shattered Spain's 300 year-long encapsulation of the islands, and the Treaty of Paris of that same year transferred Spain's sovereignty to the United States of America. The Philippine's first historical crisis had occurred 333 years previous, in 1565, when Legaspi's cannons at Cebu had begun the Spanish conquest of these islands and the process of their eventual hispanicization.

When the Americans took over the Philippines they had expected to be looked upon as liberators. But the leaders of the Philippine Revolution, General Emilio Aguinaldo and his followers, for their part, had believed at first that the Americans were there to help them become immediately independent. When the Filipinos realized that the Americans were not going to grant them immediate independence the tragedy of the so-called "Philippine Insurrection" ensued. Even before this unfortunate "war" was over in 1901, many American political leaders were inspired by the vision of being able, for the first time, to train a foreign nation which they considered woefully backward in the ways of American democracy. Some Americans, however, notably William Jennings Bryan and the Anti-Imperialist League, objected to this policy. But the "manifest destiny" doctrine took the day. American sovereignty was firmly established in the islands, and American administrators took over the wheels of government.

One of their first acts was to set up a system of public education which even today is considered by many Filipinos as America's finest contribution to their country. They purposed to train the people in democracy, raise their standard of living, and teach them English. The first civil governor of the Philippines, William H. Taft (1901-1904), put down banditry and established a rule of justice. He purchased lands of the Roman Catholic Church, and began

to establish the base for a growing economy. His genial personality and his policy of "the Philippines for the Filipinos" did much to win the sympathy of the Filipinos for the American administration. But it was still a country under foreign rule.

Social and Cultural Situation

The Philippine society of the early twentieth century which saw the birth of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was very different from the one into which Spain had introduced Roman Catholicism more than three centuries previous. In the sixteenth century, the small population of only about one million was scattered over the islands, clustered in small settlements called *barangays* which dotted the coastlines and river valleys. By 1900 the population had grown to almost eight million, and three centuries of Spanish domination mediated through the Catholic friars (the missionaries of those days) had radically changed the social and cultural life of the people. Ninety-two percent of the people had been "Christianized," or more accurately had been hispanized. Three percent were Moslem. The remaining five percent were pagan tribal people living mostly in the mountain areas.

The Spanish colonial program of gathering the widely scattered population into Spanish-type towns known as *reduccion* had finally begun to make an impact on the life of the people by the end of the Spanish period. Towns were beginning to grow in the major islands, and *barrios* (small villages attached to the towns) had replaced the older Malayan *barangays*. The growing towns prepared the way for the increasing urbanization during the American period, but the basically fragmentary nature of traditional Malayan society still underlay the increasingly complex nature of Philippine society.

The basic unit remained the bilateral nuclear family. A person's loyalty was first to his family, then to his barrio or community. Because of the bilateral nature of the Filipino family with the kinship lines extending through both the father and mother for several degrees, the "extended family" could be quite extended indeed. Many, if not all, churches have found that their growth patterns have been heavily influenced by the kinship lines of their members, and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is no exception. The family "web" type of movement into the church occurred often following family lines (see McGavran, 1970:322).

The early twentieth century saw the American administration seeking to modify the strongly hierarchical social structure left by the Spanish, but with little success. True, the Spanish friars who had been at the top of the social order were sent home, but this only tended to make the power of the landowning *cacique* class more secure. The predominantly agricultural economy of the country was built on a broad base of tenant peasantry. The higher classes composed less than ten percent of the population. The rest lived in grinding poverty. Nevertheless, because of the reforms introduced by the new regime, buying up of friar lands, free trade with America, educational reforms, public health measures and many others, a new middle class did begin to emerge; and a general lifting of living standards was felt by all.

Culturally, many changes were occurring. To a basic core of traditional Malayan culture Spanish rule had added a deep layer of Hispanic culture. To this Americans now added a richly varied contribution. The older values of *hiya* (personal modesty, a sensitivity to the possibility of being shamed), and *utang na loob* (a sense of obligatory gratitude) retained their hold on the Filipino mind. But newer values of justice, the dignity of labor, and democra-

cy were being injected into the life of the people. Dissatisfaction with the past made most Filipinos very open to new deas. The twentieth century has been a period of rapid social and cultural change for Filipinos, and some churches, such as the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, rode the crest of the wave of change.

Religious Situation

Not the least of these changes was the drastic change in the religious life of the people which occurred during the years immediately following the American acquisition of the islands. Until 1898 Spain had almost completely insulated the Philippines from outside non-Roman Catholic religious influences. Even Philippine-language Bibles which had been printed in Spain itself were turned back at the port in Manila and were stored in Hong Kong to wait until the United States opened the islands in 1898.

Under American administration the power of the friars was broken, and genuine religious freedom was immediately enforced. As American politicians had seen the Philippines as a great opportunity to extend democracy into the Far East, so American church leaders from all the major denominations looked upon the opening of the Philippines to the Gospel as a God-given opportunity to preach and teach the biblical message to a needy people who, though formally Christianized, had never known the evangelical faith or even opened a Bible.

The Presbyterians under the leadership of James B. Rodgers led the way. Very quickly, Methodists, Baptists, United Brethren, Disciples of Christ, and Episcopalians followed. Within four years eight mission societies had entered the Philippines to begin their evangelistic, educational, and medical ministries. To avoid unnecessary competition

and friction, these missions (with the exception of the Protestant Episcopal which had already decided not to raise "altar against altar" of the Roman Catholics) entered into a classic comity agreement, known as the Evangelical Alliance. As it turned out, this agreement did not remove all sources of friction and competition. Those who had received the largest areas in which to work were the most satisfied with it.

In addition to the entering Protestant missions, a tremendous revolt against Rome created an indigenous Independent Catholic Church. It was known as *La Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI), led by a former Roman Catholic priest, Gregorio Aglipay, and gained the allegiance of maybe three million Filipinos. Though retaining most of the forms of Roman Catholicism, including the mass and use of images, IFI leaders were virulently rationalistic and definitely unitarian in their doctrine. It is still an interesting historical question as to what might have happened to this church had not the United States Supreme Court ruled against it in the matter of its taking over the town cathedrals in areas in which its members made up the majority of the population. But this decision—giving the church buildings back to the Roman Catholic Church—broke the back of this burgeoning movement; and it began to decline in strength, though it still numbers about one and a half million members, and is larger than all the Protestants put together.

Not only was early twentieth century Philippine religious life marked by a new, enriching, and sometimes very confusing diversity; it was also characterized by the struggle of Filipino Protestant leaders for recognition and self-determination. Nationalism is not a recent phenomenon. It has been a strong force in Philippine church life

since the latter part of the 19th century. Aglipay and his followers dealt a severe blow to the ideal of the unity of the Roman Catholic Church as they pressed for the recognition of a truly Philippine Catholic Church. And soon after its beginning, Philippine Protestantism began to feel similar nationalistic pressures. The first major schism occurred within the Methodist Church when in 1909 Nicolas Zamora broke with the American dominated church to form the independent *La Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas* (IEMELIF).

Philippine religious life was becoming more complex as the years went by, but also increasingly dynamic. Different churches were multiplying congregations rapidly in many parts of the islands. Not all areas were proving equally responsive to the Gospel but the impact of the Good News was being increasingly felt in the cities, towns, and even barrios of the country. It was a time of great religious ferment, a time which saw the birth of many religious movements.

This then was the setting and the times in which an unknown, Felix Manalo by name, began the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. It was a period characterized on the one hand by admiration for things American, yet on the other by Filipinos seeking to establish their own distinct identity. Many people were being attracted to the churches being established by the favored Americans. But to others these churches still seemed foreign and not "ours." Religious diversity was exciting, yet a nostalgia existed for the simpler days when you knew which was the true Church. To say that Manalo was in some part a product of his time is not to diminish the significance of what he did. Other churches were also founded during that period which did not grow as his did. What we know about the nation's life during

those days will help us understand better what was happening in Manalo's mind and life as he acted and reacted in establishing the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

The Iglesia has come a long way since those early struggling days. We shall see that it achieved its greatest growth and made its most significant impact after the Second World War. To help us understand the influence of the environment on this church, and its influence on this environment, let us now briefly describe the contemporary Philippine scene.

The Philippines Today

Present Social, Political Situation

The Philippines today is a young, vigorous republic which, though beset by many critical problems, is full of vision of what it yet may become. One of the first colonial nations to receive its independence after World War II, it is still in its first generation as an independent government. Its birth (or better, rebirth) on July 4, 1946, though attended with great fanfare, was nevertheless less than auspicious. The physically battered country was economically prostrated because of the war. The massive bombardments during the liberation campaigns almost completely destroyed Manila, and the country's production facilities were virtually wiped out. Great amounts of aid were needed and given by the United States, yet not without strings. The country eventually recovered from the ravages of war, but it still has had to face a series of severe internal crisis which have continued to plague it until the present.

Deeply rooted agrarian problems caused by a peasant economy controlled largely by the landowners lie at the root of many of the country's problems. Almost imme-

diately after independence in 1946, the communist-inspired "Huk" rebellion began to rock central Luzon. Constituted government was seriously threatened by 1950 and found itself fighting for its existence. Firm and inspired leadership by Ramon Magsaysay, first as Secretary of Defense, and later in 1953, as President, restored the people's confidence in government and broke the back of this movement. Throughout these troubled years, the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, grew by leaps and bounds. Social unrest set the stage for religious change.

Land reform was promised and token steps taken, but the underlying problems remained. In the late 1960's revolutionary uprisings sharply increased again. By 1968 a new Communist Party of the Philippines had been organized by a group of young communists under the leadership of Jose Ma. Sison, founder of the *Kabataang Makabayan* ("Patriotic Youth"), a Maoist communist front organization. This group then aligned forces with Bernabe Buscayno ("Commander Dante"), who organized the New People's Army with an estimated strength in 1971 of 1,000 to 2,000 combat troops, 5,000 support troops, and a mass base of about 50,000, mostly in central Luzon (Marcos, 1971:x,xi).

By the middle of 1972 the government of President Ferdinand E. Marcos faced three powerful threats to its existence. The first was the highly organized Maoist communist threat described above. The second was a generalized breakdown of law and order. Third was the threat of secession by militant Moslems in Mindanao and Sulu. The level of violence and revolutionary activity continued to rise until President Marcos felt that there was no recourse but to declare martial law. On September 21, 1972 he issued Proclamation 1081, placing the entire nation under martial law.

The obvious and immediate changes under martial law were the cessation of all overt anti-government agitation, strict government control of all media, collection of loose firearms, and suspension of some civil liberties. But other reforms began to be introduced which the country's leadership hopes will eventually reshape Philippine society. Land reform is being aggressively enforced in rice-producing Central Luzon. The educational program is being completely reshaped to fit it better to the needs of national development. New standards of cleanliness are being enforced. Government employees are showing a new sense of discipline. The "New Society" is being promoted by songs, slogans, and innovative reform programs. Even the old constitution has now been replaced by one featuring a parliamentary system of government which will take effect when martial law is lifted.

Deeply rooted social and cultural features usually change very slowly, and only under great pressure. Martial law or not, the Filipino family remains a fundamental social reality, but rapidly increasing population and increasing urbanization have brought unusual pressures to bear on Philippine society as a whole. In 1948 the population was 19,234,182. In 1970 it was 36,590,068 — almost double in a little more than twenty years. And the Philippines has no more "frontier" unsettled areas. Wide disparity still exists between the living standards of the higher classes and the lower, and recent natural disasters such as floods and typhoons have made life especially difficult for the very poor. Multiplying suburban housing projects is an important demographic development which has occurred since World War II with important implications for the growth patterns of the churches in the Philippines. The *Iglesia ni Cristo*, as well as other churches, are multiplying in these burgeoning urban areas.

Beneath the many shared cultural patterns which enable us to speak of a "pan-Philippine" society (see Mednick, 1965:5), lies a fascinating mosaic of sub-cultures. Wycliffe Bible Translators list 163 languages and dialects in their 1970 "Philippine Ethnologue," beginning with Aeta in Luzon, and ending with the Yakan language in Sulu. And when the dimensions of social class, religious loyalties, and occupational interests are added to the linguistic variety, a picture of the immense complexity of the task facing Christian communicators begins to emerge.

Present Religious Situation

The great fact of post-World War II Philippine religious life has not been the fulfillment of the ecumenical vision of such pioneers as James B. Rodgers, or Bishop Enrique Sobrepeña. Rather it has been the opposite, a growing religious diversity and complexity. In part, this has been the result of the great influx of new missionary organizations after the war. But it has also been the result of many internal developments within the Filipino churches themselves. It would seem that the Christian dynamics cannot be contained simply within previously existing organizational structures; it rather continues to burst out in new, and sometimes, disconcerting directions.

In 1970 at least 72 Christian denominations had memberships of over 500 (Tuggy, Toliver, 1972:175ff), and the total number of registered religious organizations was much higher than this (Elwood, 1968:75ff, lists 368 religious organizations). The older denominations, such as the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) (140,000), Seventh Day Adventists (150,000), United Methodists (80,000), and Convention Baptists (59,000), still have the bulk of Protestant membership. But newer post-War

denominations, such as the Southern Baptists (25,000) and the Church of the Foursquare Gospel (22,000), are growing more rapidly than the older churches and, taken as a whole, may well be considered the "third force" in Philippine Protestantism. In 1970 Protestants numbered about one million. More numerous still than the mainline and newer Protestants is the Independent Philippine Church with about 1,500,000 members. It continues to decline, however, and statistics prove that other Protestant churches, and especially the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, are growing at its expense.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, numbering over 30 million, has felt the strong winds of change blowing through her ancient structures. Christian renewal movements growing out of Vatican II, on the one hand, and radical Catholic political activism on the other, have made themselves felt in the Philippines in recent years. During the 1960's the *cursillo* movement, with its strong emphasis upon lay leadership made a great impact on the Church of Rome but its influence now seems to be waning. Radical leftist Catholicism also has been silenced since the imposition of martial law, though some of the reforms instituted by President Marcos (a devout Roman Catholic) may be traced at least partially to its influence.

The Place of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in Philippine Life Today

We have attempted to sketch, with rather broad and sweeping strokes, a picture of the Philippine setting in which the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has been growing through these almost sixty years, and continues to grow today. Now we shall look at the church itself in its setting, and ask, "What is its place in the Philippine picture? How large does it loom on the religious horizon? And what kind of an impact

does it make on the nation as a whole?" This book presents extended answers to these questions but we need to have at least some idea about these things as we begin our more detailed analysis.

First of all, its very size is impressive. With more than a half million members in over 2,500 local churches scattered over the whole archipelago, it represents a religious force that cannot be ignored. No matter where you are in the Philippines it is influential, though it is much stronger in some areas than in others. Its impressive beautiful cathedral-chapels in the major towns and cities add to this image of imposing power. For years Protestants have scorned the *Iglesia* because its members have come mainly from the "masses" not the "classes." Yet now this has turned out to be its great advantage, not a weakness.

The church's political power must be reckoned with in any Philippine election or referendum (under martial law). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* strongly insists that all its members vote as a block, and is not at all embarrassed to defend this practice which, it says, is based upon Scripture. The policy has certainly been to its benefit when dealing with politicians and government officials through the years.

By its very aggressive methods of propagation, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has stirred the religious interest of people all over the Philippines. It has been able at least to wake the interest of people in religious issues, even when it made many of them angry. Other churches in the Philippines cannot ignore this church. It forces itself on the attention. The major target of its attacks, the Roman Catholic Church, has naturally been defensive in its attitude. Protestants also have felt the sting of the *Iglesia's* attacks, and usually feel hostile toward it.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* definitely sees itself now as one of the major religious bodies in the Philippines, and must be so seen by others. This was indicated clearly to me by Cipriano Sandoval, the church's Secretary General, in an interview at its palatial new headquarters in Diliman, Quezon City (1971). He remarked pointedly that when Pope Paul VI arrived for his special visit to the Philippines on November 27, 1970, representatives of the four major religious bodies met him, one of which was a representative of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. The others were the Roman Catholic Church, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, and the Moslem community. Even though the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is so strongly anti-Catholic, its leaders were happy to join in welcoming the Pope because this dramatized its position as a leading Philippine religious body.

As we conclude this introductory chapter we want to try to clarify how we will view the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in this book. Should we consider it as basically a religio-political society (cf. Ando, 1969)? Or as another heretical sect such as the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses (the view of most American missionaries)? Or as an independent Philippine church similar to those now multiplying in many nations in Africa and described by David Barrett and others?

To consider it as a religio-political society would enable us to see some of the sociological dimensions of its growth patterns, particularly in Central Luzon, more clearly; but I believe that it would produce a distorted picture of the church, and would directly conflict with its own self-image. It calls itself the Church of Christ! Though it has had great political power, it has always considered this as a means to a religious end; and basically that end has been to protect its interests in opposition to the Roman

Catholic Church. To consider it simply as an heretical sect does not take seriously enough its commitment to the Bible, nor its size and power.

The most helpful image then is that of an independent church, sub-Christian though it may be in some doctrines and practices from the evangelical Christian viewpoint, but a church that has arisen as an extension of, and reaction to, the missions. It is a church that is obviously meeting felt needs in the lives of its many Filipino members. In a later chapter we will deal with this concept of independency more thoroughly, and will seek to show that the phenomenon which Barrett has studied in detail in Africa (see Barret, 1968) has an even broader application. To call the *Iglesia ni Cristo* an independent Filipino church is probably the most helpful, and least judgmental, way to categorize it.

Such was the environment in which the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was planted, and in which it grew. We can now see its growth in proper perspective, and understand the dynamics of this growth more fully. To tell this story accurately and to study these dynamics in detail is the task that faces us in the coming chapters.

CHAPTER 2

ITS FOUNDER

A great institution, it has been said, is but the lengthened shadow of a great personality. As to the greatness of Felix Manalo, opinions vary; but of the largeness and power of the church he founded, no one can doubt. To his followers Manalo was the Sent One, the Sugo, the Angel of the East. To those outside his church he has often been considered the Philippine arch-heretic, a man to be avoided and feared. What was the story of this remarkable man who led his church from a small, raggedy band in 1914 to a mammoth nation-wide movement at the time of his death in 1963 that indeed has extended overseas since that time?

Family Background and Childhood

To reconstruct this part of Manalo's biography, we have to depend upon secondary sources. The most informative is the biographical article in the 1964 50th Anniversary edition of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* magazine, **Pasugo**, written by Dolores G. Garcia (pages 179ff). This English article gives some evidence of having been based upon interviews held in Tagalog with Felix Manalo himself before his death. The anecdotal nature of the report, use of Tagalog terms for his parents' means of livelihood, and especially the familiar forms of reference used (e.g., "Mang Mente" to refer to his step-father, Clemente Mozo), all support this view. Manalo apparently did not grant interviews to researchers who were not members of the church (see Sta. Romana, 1955:330).

Felix Manalo Ysagun was born on May 10, 1886, in sitio (hamlet) Calzada, barrio Tipas, municipality of Taguig,

Rizal province. Soon after his birth he was taken by his parents, Mariano Ysagun and Bonifacia Manalo, to the barrio church at Tipas to be baptized by the parish priest. Like many another Filipino couple, they chose a name for his christening from the "calendar" (the roster of saints for that particular month). Felix was the name they chose, a "happy" choice indeed.

Taguig lies along the northwest shore of the Philippines' largest island body of water, the Laguna de Bay lake, about fifteen kilometers (eight miles) southeast of Manila. Today it forms part of a large industrial and manufacturing area that has grown up along the northwestern shores of the lake near where it flows into the Pasig river which is its only outlet into the sea in Manila Bay. In former times one of Taguig's major sources of income was supplying Manila markets with fresh water fish and shrimp. As a young boy, Felix would join his father in fishing and shrimp catching. He also remembered going out to the rice fields with his cousin, Modesto Ysagun, to graze the water buffalo (carabao) which were used in cultivating the fields.

While he was still a young boy Felix Manalo showed strong leadership traits which were to stand him in good stead throughout his life. True, these were shown sometimes in mischievous, and even bullying ways, but from childhood he had an intense drive to always "end up on top." Garcia tells how he and his cousin would set up boxing or wrestling matches with other fellows working in the rice fields with them. For these matches their lunches of boiled rice wrapped up in young banana leaves were at stake. The two eventually began to go to the fields without carrying a launch; so confident were they that they would win theirs anyway. Felix was also full of practical jokes, such as spreading manure on a carabao's

back, much to the discomfort of the young rider who would be mounting it later. He came to be recognized, says Garcia, as the "champion of, and for, Barrio Calzada youth" (1964:179,180).

Another story dramatically underlines his strong aversion for defeat. As a young man he once became involved in a fight which lasted from morning until night, the weapon being a horsewhip. He finally emerged victorious, but the wounds caused by the continuous lashing became so inflamed that he was ill for a week. But the important thing for him was that he had won (Sta. Romana, 1965: 331).

Felix Manalo's formal schooling was very limited. Kavanagh says that at age seven he began to attend classes conducted by Macario Ocampo ("Maestro Cario"), a Manila school teacher who came to the barrio to teach the children the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic (n.d.:5). Felix could not have progressed beyond the second or third grade when the Philippine revolution of 1896 interrupted his studies. He never resumed them until he began studying in Bible school as an adult.

Felix' religious instruction, however, began quite early in his home, for his mother was very devout. She was known in the community as a "manang," which means that she attended church at almost every opportunity, usually daily. She instilled in him a love for God and saw to it that he attended the *caton*, or catechism class, where he learned the common prayers ("dasal") and fundamental doctrines of the Roman Church.

About the time of the 1896 revolution when Felix was ten years old and his sister Praxedes, a couple of years younger, his father died. His mother remarried, this time to a widower, Clemente Mozo, who had two child-

ren of his own. These did not survive long after the marriage. According to Kavanagh (n.d.:4), Bonifacia bore Clemente five, possibly six children; but only two of these had survived, a daughter Fausta, and a son Baldomero. Garcia (1964:180) mentions only these two, and reports that the father, Clemente died two months before Baldomero was born. These must have been very hard times for the young Felix. Sta. Romana's statement that Felix Manalo's parents were "a well-to-do" couple is difficult to accept (1955:331). The very fact that Felix had only two or three years' schooling would seem to contradict it. The family's means of livelihood, fishing, shrimp-catching, farming, and finally mat-making, also indicate that they were never in the "well-to-do" category.

Conditions in this part of the Philippines were unsettled throughout this period. The Philippine revolution was soon followed by the American take-over which led to three years of Filipino-American fighting. War conditions and family tragedies marked Felix Manalo's teenage years. Later when he was to live in luxury as the head of his church, he still had a remarkable rapport with the poor and laboring class of people. They could identify with him because he once was where they were.

A restless, ambitious young man, Felix tried his hand at other means of earning a living while his mother continued to work in a small bamboo mat factory ("lapatan"). He learned photography from his cousin, Serapio Ysagun, and worked for a time in his uncle's small studio. He also learned some gold-smithing, barbering, and finally hat-making which became his trade. During his religious pilgrimage as he went from one church to another, sometimes receiving remuneration, sometimes not, he could always fall back on his hat-making business when he found it necessary.

Manalo's Spiritual Odyssey

First Steps

What started Manalo on his spiritual quest which was to lead him through five denominations before he decided to found his own? Some confusion about the details of the story exists, but one thing is clear: it was the Bible and Manalo's awakened interest in it that launched him into his religious search for truth. Garcia tells of a visit Felix and his cousin made to their "Manong" (uncle?) during which they found a package on one of the church pews in Sampaloc, Manila (1964:180). Inspecting the package, they found a Bible. This sparked Manalo's interest in the Scriptures.

Sta. Romana's version is more elaborate (1955:331). She states that his parents entrusted him to his uncle who was a Catholic priest, and that he could have continued his studies under the guidance of this uncle; but during his stay with this uncle he was told that, "black books with red sides are of the devil." Since this description fit both the Bible and his uncle's prayer book, Manalo became so confused that he just ran away from home to Manila. It appears that at this point Sta. Romana is depending on a secondary source (a newspaper article), so Garcia's version may be the more authentic, especially if it is based on Manalo's actual recollections. It is certainly simpler, though the "black book with red sides" statement may have actually been made by a priest to Manalo and served to fuel his curiosity about the Bible. In any event, it was his initial contact with the Bible that first moved him to ponder and question the things he had been taught about God and religion.

The "Colorum" Religions

Felix Manalo, restless and inquiring, began his search for religious certainty. The Philippine Independent Church, though it had gained many adherents, failed to interest him. Though it was strongly nationlistic in spirit, and liberal—even unitarian—in doctrine, to Manalo it seemed no different essentially than its mother, the Roman Catholic Church. Daily mass, recited prayers, burning incense, robed priests—the forms were the same and Manalo was not attracted. But the *colorum* religions of Mount Banahaw were different. Mysterious, secret, underground (the meaning of the word "*colorum*"), they offered immediate and reciprocal communication with the Supreme Being. You could ask God a question, and hear his audible answer in the dark recesses of mountain caves. So as a teenager, young Felix joined the pilgrimage to Mt. Banahaw, near the town of Dolores, Quezon province, to be initiated into the mysteries of this religion.

As a missionary who has been involved in planting new churches in the various towns around the base of this now extinct 6,000-foot volcano, I had often heard of these "*colorum*" mystery religions (for there are still many factions) which center around the dark caves and sacred springs of this mountain, and its neighbor, Mt. San Cristobal. I had met "true believers" who told me of the voice which spoke to them out of the cave, telling them to read the Bible, keep the Ten Commandments, and observe the Sabbath Day. I decided that I should visit the "holy places" of Mt. Banahaw myself, observe what the pilgrims did, and if possible, interview some. The best time to visit the area, I was told, was during Holy Week when pilgrims from all over Southern Luzon flocked to the area.

So, on March 26, 1970, Holy Thursday, accompanied by Pastor Agapito Bernardo, and a church member, Mr. Sinoy Ramos, who was a former "colorum" believer, I made my way to barrios Santa Lucia and Kinabuhayan of Dolores town (see Tuggy, 1971b:48). I asked Mr. Ramos what the word "colorum" meant. He answered, "Walang simbahan" ("having no church buildings"). He went on to explain that these folks believe that you could be more sincere in praying here in the jungle than in the town churches ("como gubat, mas taimtim"). Manalo was no doubt attracted here for similar reasons.

Barrio Santa Lucia contains many sacred spots. We made our way down a very steep ravine to see people praying and burning candles before a large rock, which they called "Infinity Stone." Then we hiked to "Jacob's Well," a spring whose waters supposedly would keep a person from contracting disease for the ensuing year.

We passed a grotto called "Presentahan kina San Pablo at San Pedro," meaning "the place where you present yourself to St. Paul and St. Peter," apparently to ask permission to be initiated into the mysteries. Some of the sects baptize their members here. Maybe Manalo passed through these waters on his pilgrimage.

After lunch, we left Santa Lucia, and hiked under the hot noonday sun to "Kinabuhayan," which literally means the "place where (Christ) was raised from the dead." The rock which supposedly had covered the grave of Jesus was lying in the river, and the area was marked by many sacred grottos. Here we met members of various Rizalista sects. Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero, was executed before a firing squad in Manila on December 30, 1896. The members of these sects honoring him say that he never really died. One with whom I spoke told me that, "Jose

(Rizal), Jesus, and Jehovah, are one and the same." The religions centering around these sacred spots seem to fall into two main categories: these "Rizalistas" (who probably had not yet begun when Manalo visited here), and the mystery religions, such as the "Rosa Mystica sa Espiritu" (Mystical Rose in the Spirit). Mr. Ramos told me that the sacred spots were given their Christian names by some Jesuit priests back in the 18th century. The resultant religions are definitely syncretistic and could well have developed as a result of giving Christian names to previously pagan sacred spots.

The grotto, "Cave of God the Father," lies about four kilometers further up the mountain from "Kinabuhayan," so I was not able to visit it during my one-day trip. This may have been the place where Manalo went "to speak with God." In any event, his biographer, Garcia, says that when Felix discovered that the "voice of the Almighty" emanated from a quite ordinary human *colorum* leader, he was disillusioned and went back home to work again (1964:180). Sta. Romana omits the entire *colorum* episode.

Manalo raised a little capital and opened a small hat shop near a stone bridge in Parañaque, just south of Manila. The shop progressed well and he took on a couple of assistants, one of whom was Eusebio Sunga, whom we shall meet again in our story. The hat shop soon expanded to include a barber shop. In the meantime, Felix' religious search continued.

The Methodist Episcopal Church

Felix was still a teenager when he became a Protestant. The decisive event was a debate between a Roman Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor which he witnessed one evening in Manila. The subject of the debate was whether

or not the use of images was permitted by the Scriptures. To Felix it was almost unbelievable that a Catholic priest could be defeated; but as he later related to his listeners, he had seen it with his own eyes and heard it with his own ears (Sta. Romana, 1955:332). Following Sta. Romana's ordering of events, Sanders (1969:352) puts this debate in the year 1902 when Felix was only sixteen years old. This dating is possible, though it would mean that the debate probably occurred while Manalo was still dabbling in *colorumism*. However, since Garcia and Sta. Romana both agree that Manalo joined the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1904 when he was eighteen years old, it would be possible, and seems probable, that the debate occurred not too much before this. It likely was a Methodist pastor whom he heard debated, since this was the period during which the Methodists were vigorously pressing their evangelistic and church-planting work in Manila.

As a young Methodist, Felix attended Bible training classes and may have become an "exhorter" or even a lay-preacher for the denomination. Methodists were growing very rapidly during this time, and they were making effective use of laymen to spearhead their expansion. In 1904 Methodist missionary Stuntz reported a full membership of 6,842 after only five years of missionary effort, and stated, "Such ripeness for evangelism has never been seen in any Roman Catholic field" (1904:492). Felix became so involved in his studies and church work that he gave his hat business to his partner, Eusebio Sunga. He sold Bibles in his spare time to help support himself.

But family tragedy struck again. News came that his mother was dying, so Felix left his studies and rushed to his mother's side. He arrived in time to decide against her receiving the sacrament of supreme unction. He did this in his position as elder son, standing on his convictions

as a young Protestant. But in so doing he antagonized all his relatives, and the parish priest refused to let his mother be buried in the local Catholic cemetery. So she was buried in the Aglipayan cemetery at barrio Kabaong, on the road leading to the town of Pateros, Rizal. After his mother's death Felix stayed for a short time at his aunt's house near the "visita" or barrio Catholic chapel.

About this time, according to Garcia, Felix decided to use his mother's family name, Manalo, instead of his father's Ysagun. He did this, she says, to express his great affection for her. This may very well have been the reason for his choice, but the literal meaning of Felix Manalo, "Happy Victor" could scarcely have missed him (Manalo is the verb "to win" in Tagalog).

The Presbyterian Church

Soon after this, the restless Felix returned to Manila. This time he resumed his studies, not with the Methodists, but with the Presbyterians, at the Ellinwood Bible Training School. The reason for this change seems to have been purely practical: the Presbyterians had "better facilities" than the Methodists (Garcia, 1964:180). It may also have been symptomatic of the fact that the Methodists and Presbyterians were moving toward a jointly operated training program for their workers. Only a year or two later, in 1907, they launched Union Theological Seminary in Manila (Gowing, 1967:131).

The pioneering mission in the Philippines (their missionary, James B. Rodgers, was the first regularly appointed Protestant missionary to arrive in Manila after the American acquisition), the Presbyterians had pressed for cooperative mission efforts from the beginning. Rodgers himself spearheaded the efforts which led to the formation of the

Evangelical Union of the Philippine Islands in 1901. The founding of Union Theological Seminary was another step in seeking to present a unified Protestant witness in the Philippines.

Manalo stayed with the Presbyterians for about three and a half years (until 1908?). He boarded with a Presbyterian couple, Esteban Aquino and Rita Baqui (Filipinas often still use their maiden names after marriage). Garcia reports that he became quite attached to this couple, and though Esteban died a Protestant, Rita lived long enough to join the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

The Christian Mission (Mision Cristiana)

The next port of call in Manalo's Odyssey was the Christian Mission, known to many Filipinos as "Mision Cristiana." (Garcia confuses this mission with the Christian and Missionary Alliance which had no work in Manila at the time. This mistake on Garcia's part is quite understandable, especially if she was working from Tagalog interviews.)

Unlike the change from Methodist to Presbyterian, this change involved a change of conviction on Manalo's part, for the missionaries of the Christian Mission who came to the Philippines from the Christian Churches of America which also call themselves "Churches of Christ" preached a strong, uncompromising, immersionist and Restorationist message.

Manalo's association with the Christian Mission was determinative in many respects for his future role as the leader of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. His claim, for example, that the true Church disappeared after the death of the apostles and only reappeared in the Philippines through his leadership has a definite Restoration ring, even though

it has his own particular twist. And the name, *Iglesia ni Cristo*, is a straight translation of the strict Restorationist's "Church of Christ." We will have opportunity to explore these influences more in depth later on in this book. Here we simply want to emphasize that much of Manalo's ecclesiology is directly traceable to his early association with the Restoration movement in the Philippines. We will also see that he built his movement on a solid core of members which came to him from the Christian Mission.

The Christian Mission in the Philippines began through the efforts of an army chaplain, Herman P. Williams, who first came to Manila with the Fifth Infantry, Iowa Regiment, on December 7, 1898, four months before the Presbyterian Rodgers arrived as missionary. After his release from the Army Williams returned to the Philippines under the Foreign Christian Missionary Society on August 3, 1901. He had been preceded by four months by Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Hanna who, though appointed later, arrived earlier. Their first converts were American soldiers, but on August 8, 1902 after a sermon in Spanish, Mr. Williams baptized the first Filipino converts. Because of comity agreements made under the Evangelical Union, Williams and Hanna moved north to Laoag, Ilocos Norte, to begin work there. The Manila church was left under national leadership with Mr. Williams visiting the Manila station every six months (Ventura, 1958:13).

In 1904 the Manila station was reinforced by the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce L. Kershner. Williams had just left the field for health reasons. Kershner was to play an important role in Felix Manalo's life and ministry, even after he had formed his own church. Manalo always thought warmly of Kershner, and Kershner had a high opinion of Manalo.

Christian Mission forces were augmented again with Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Wolfe's arrival on October 29, 1907. Welcomed by the Kershners, they quickly immersed themselves in Tagalog language study. In 1908 the Christian Mission purchased a large building on Azcarraga (now Claro M. Recto) Street. Living quarters for the missionaries were upstairs, the chapel was downstairs with rooms also for training classes and for living quarters for student workers (Ventura, 1958:14).

About this time Felix Manalo came into contact with this Christian Mission. He heard the message, was convinced that he should be baptized by immersion, was baptized, and joined the church. Exactly how Manalo was contacted, we do not know. And we do not know all of the factors which may have influenced his decision. Did his lack of formal education block further advancement among the Presbyterians, particularly after Union Theological Seminary was started? We do not know. But we do know that this first decade of the twentieth century was a period of great religious ferment in the Philippines, especially in Manila, where various Protestant denominations were beginning their work. And we can very well imagine that Filipino workers of various churches quickly became aware of the distinctive teachings and practices of each church. And these were days of intense evangelistic activity as the workers of the various denominations conducted evangelistic meetings out-of-doors and in the homes as well. No doubt, through some contact with aggressive Christian workers, Manalo heard the message and was convinced that the Christian Mission's stand on baptism by immersion was more faithful to the Bible's clear teaching than the position of the other churches with which he had been associated.

Felix Manalo was about twenty-two years old when he joined the Christian Mission. Garcia says that he was designated "evangelist" (probably "student worker") soon after joining, and that he attended classes in Bible Science for four years (1964:180). This would mean that he attended classes at the Manila College of the Bible. And in the light of their future relationship, it is important to note that Bruce L. Kershner served as President of this college from 1906-1917. Undoubtedly, this scholar made a great impact on Felix as a young student of the Bible.

Bible study among the workers of the Christian Mission was not carried on as an academic exercise. Rather, the students were infused from the beginning with a strong missionary passion. Soon a band of local evangelists was formed, called in Tagalog, **Samahang Tagapagpalaganap ng Ebanghelio** ("Society for the Propagation of the Gospel"), with Leon M. Baña, first President. The Church of Christ (1901) (as the Christian Mission is known today) published a memorial book honoring Mrs. Leslie Wolfe on her fiftieth anniversary in the Philippines. It contains a photograph of some of these early evangelists and she gives their full names except for one whom she simply calls, "Brother Felix." Could this have been Felix Manalo?

Mr. Leslie Wolfe later reflected on these early days.

Not among any of us missionaries nor among the Filipino ministers with us was there one that advocated "another Gospel." We were a unit in speaking the same thing with reference to the essentials. The Gospel just as found in the Book, though new, was marvelous to our Filipino preachers. . . . These men preached the Gospel with all the eloquence and fire peculiar to the Tagalogs. (Ventura, 1958:14)

In commenting on the "eloquence and fire peculiar to the Tagalogs," was Wolfe possibly thinking of Felix Manalo, among others?

During his time with the Christian Mission Felix Manalo married a young lady who was also a member of the same group, Tomasa Sereneo, of Ulilang Kawayan, Paco, Manila. Our sources tell us nothing more of this marriage other than the fact that their son, Ricardo, died young (Garcia, 1964:181).

Though we have used the adjective "restless" to describe Manalo during these years, we have no indication that his next move in his religious journey was occasioned by any dissatisfaction with the Christian Mission. It was rather a case of being convinced by someone he had set out to convince.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church

One of the unique experiences which occurred in the course of this research was the unusual opportunity to interview the founder of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in the Philippines who personally converted Felix Manalo to Adventism! This missionary, Elder L. V. Finster, had just celebrated his one hundredth birthday shortly before the interview was held in his home in Arlington, California. The following account rests largely on information gained during this interview.

The Adventist message first reached the Philippines through the efforts of a colporteur, Caldwell, in 1905. Sometime after this an English-speaking church was begun for Americans residing in the Philippines. But Adventist work among Filipinos did not begin until the arrival of L. V. Finster on December 17, 1908. Finster had previously served in Australia for about seven years.

Elder Finster relates that the work began very slowly. He began learning the Tagalog language by going to the local market and trying to make himself understood to

the vendors. At the same time he was making contacts with college students who were eager to improve their English. They, in turn, were able to help Finster make valuable contacts for his work. In 1911 the first Seventh Day Adventist baptisms were held. According to Bangloy, Manalo joined the church at this time (1956:36,37). But Finster very strongly disputes this, saying Manalo's conversion came a little later.

Early in 1912 Finster was teaching a standard Seventh Day Adventist sequence of Bible studies in a home. Some attending these studies told Felix Manalo about what they were studying. He very confidently spread the word that he was going to attend these meetings and publicly disprove what Finster was teaching. He was very sure of his position that Christians were no longer under the law. Finster heard that Manalo was going to attend, so he especially prepared for him. He gathered all his materials to answer the standard objections concerning Adventist doctrines, including notes on all the Scripture passages that are usually marshalled against them.

Finster tells of his first impressions of Felix Manalo. He was, Finster said, a very active, excitable person, even fidgety. He was very aggressive in his questioning. He had a long list of questions, but after Finster had successfully answered them one by one, Manalo manfully said, "You know, that man is right!"

Manalo continued his studies with Finster for several months. After this indoctrination he joined the church. Finster could not remember whether Manalo joined by baptism or by Christian experience. Bangloy indicates the latter. This is reasonable since Manalo had already been immersed by the Christian Mission. Finster held a short-term Bible Institute for workers in 1912, but he was certain that Manalo did not attend. Finster left for furlough

to the United States in the latter part of 1912, and had no first-hand information about what happened during the crucial 1912-13 year. He just remembers that when he returned about a year later, Manalo no longer was with the Adventists.

When Finster left for furlough, he was replaced by E. M. Adams. Finster saw some storm clouds on the horizon as he left when Manalo remarked to him, "I don't know if I can submit to the dictations of Adams." This type of remark, by the way, would seem to indicate that Manalo already had some type of employment within the church where he would have to take directions from Adams. Adams confirms that Manalo was a "worker," though Sta. Romana is wrong in stating that he was ordained by them. Bangloy reports that the Adventist ordained their first Filipino ministers in 1916, but by that time Manalo had long since left the church (1956:49).

Sometime during this period Felix' first wife, Tomasa died. She had apparently joined the Seventh Day Adventist by profession of faith at the same time as Felix (see Bangloy, 1956:37, who lists a Mrs. Tomas Manalo.)

Early in 1913 Manalo began courting a Seventh Day Adventist girl, Honorata de Guzman, of Rizal Avenue, Manila. He apparently eloped with her. Because the American missionary who was the only Adventist with authority to marry did not approve of this marriage, they were married by Pastor Emiliano Quijano of the Christian Mission on May 9th of that year.

After the marriage Garcia says that the newly-weds proceeded to Malolos, Bulacan, where Manalo had been assigned as evangelist (1964:181). Sta. Romana also mentions the Malolos assignment, but places it somewhat earlier. Here and at other points, Garcia's account harmonizes better with the Adventist sources.

Sometime around the middle of the year, Garcia reports, during a conference of Adventist workers in Malolos Manalo raised certain questions about the doctrine and practices of the Seventh Day Adventists. This discussion, she says, degenerated into a heated argument, and Felix Manalo resigned and took his wife back to Manila.

Adventist sources disagree with this version of Manalo's separation from their church. E. M. Adams, in a letter to the author, states that Manalo was twice disciplined. First, he was temporarily suspended because of his elopement. The second time he was disciplined for moral indiscretion. Adams comments, "Naturally he became our worst enemy in the Philippines" (Adams, 1973).

For whatever reasons the separation was made, and it was final. Manalo and his wife returned to Manila and stayed first at the home of his cousin, Susana Ysagun, who managed a small *karihan* (eatery) in the Singalong district. He then contacted Eusebio Sunga who offered to let Manalo take over again as manager of their hat and barber shop. Manalo moved the business from Parañaque to Pasay, closer to Manila.

Even during this period Felix Manalo's quest for religious certainty drove him on. He began to associate with freethinkers and atheists. Sta. Romana pictures this as the nadir of his spiritual experience, a result of his disillusionment with the various churches he had joined (1955: 333). Garcia says that while he enjoyed discussing religious topics with these sceptics he was repelled by their deliberate mis-use of Scripture. Those with whom Manalo associated during this brief period are a fairly common type of person, known in the Philippines as *mga pilosopo* (philosophers), often with a derogatory connotation. He did not stay long in their company.

An idea which he had apparently been thinking about for quite some time grew in his mind. Maybe the answer to all the religious confusion surrounding him was to begin a new church! Obviously, all of the other churches could not be right, and he despaired of finding a true church out of the many which had presented themselves to him. The answer then was to start a new church, one based only on Scripture, and one of which he, not a foreigner, was the leader.

In his definitive study of African independent churches, David Barrett points out that "the final condition without which independency cannot occur must take place: the appearance of a charismatic personality, visionary, seer or prophet" (1968:218). In the closing months of the year 1913 in Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila, Felix Manalo "appeared" fulfilling that final condition. To that story we now turn.

CHAPTER 3

ITS BEGINNING AND EARLY HISTORY

Beginnings (1913-1922)

Felix Manalo's position in the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is unique: he was its founder and, it believes, its special messenger from God. But as a religious phenomenon, he is not unique. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has its Felix Manalo, just as the Zairian Kimbanguist Church has its Simon Kimbangu, the Eglise Harriste its Prophet Harris, and the Chinese Assembly Hall its Watchman Nee. Rapidly multiplying independent churches around the world are characteristically led by such men who are often termed "prophets" and are thought of by their followers as God's special messengers.

The story of the founding of a religious body may be told simply in terms of what happened to its leader and what he did. And the causes for its rise may be traced to his inner psychological or spiritual states. Church historians often take this approach. But the origins of a religious movement may also be traced to cultural and social conditions existing in the environment in which the religion grew, largely discounting personal factors. Cultural determinists, such as A. L. Kroeber, take this latter approach because they pre-suppose that when the right precondition prevails, the social result will inevitably ensue. Even Barrett speaks of a certain number of social factors (thirteen or more on his scale) which, if present, make independency inevitable. (1968:114).

Our approach in this study will be to continue to trace the developments which led to the founding of the *Iglesia*

ni Cristo, primarily in terms of the activity of its founder.

We will do this, not because we discount the role of the social and cultural factors, but because we believe that the role of the founder was determinative in bringing into being the *Iglesia ni Cristo* with its particular structure, system of belief, power, and ethos. This is in spite of the fact that the occurrence of independency as a religious phenomenon may have been indeed inevitable during these early years of the twentieth century in the Philippines. For good or ill, what the *Iglesia* is today is largely attributable to its founder.

In Africa the term most often used to refer to the charismatic leader of a religious movement is "prophet." Haliburton, in his carefully documented book on the life and work of the Prophet Harris of West Africa, discusses this term:

A prophet, in the religious sense, is an inspired messenger of God. From a human point of view, as an anthropologist would explain it, he is a man who feels more keenly than others the problems facing his society, and preaches a saving course of change to his people. . . (1973:xi)

Haliburton then goes on to compare the role of a prophet in a non-western society with that of a politician in a western society. His analogy may have some validity in formerly colonial Africa, but it leads us astray if we apply it to Manalo. Charismatic political leaders were arising during this period in the Philippines. Manuel Quezon is an example. Felix Manalo, however, always saw the problems to which he was addressing himself as primarily religious, never social or political. He, definitely and repeatedly, taught that he was God's messenger for these "last days." In this sense which Haliburton calls the "religious sense," Manalo was a prophet.

Having said this, that Manalo was a prophet, we have not yet answered the basic question for a Christian investigator. We cannot take a secularist's approach, as apparently Haliburton does, and simply accept what a man and his followers claim. If a person says he is a prophet and gets a following, then let us accept his claim and study him as a historical and sociological phenomenon, Haliburton seems to be saying. But as convinced Christians, we believe that God works in history and among people. We believe that He was at work in the Philippines during this time we are studying. We also believe that God raises up men and movements to accomplish His will. So our ultimate question must be, "Is this movement really of God? Did He actually call Manalo to be His messenger, or not?"

To have stated this basic question is not to have answered it. But we can advance four possible answers which will help us come to grips with Manalo's claims. First of all, a person who claims to be a prophet may be a fraud. Church history is full of such, and the Scriptures warn us against them (cf. Matt. 24:11). Secondly, he may be deluded. He may be sincerely wrong. Thirdly, he may have had a genuine call from God, but in some way, possibly seriously, may not have followed God's will for his message and ministry. Fourthly, he may have been genuinely God's man for a particular historical situation and fulfilled his role obediently. All four possibilities exist; and as we pursue our investigation of Felix Manalo, we must be awake to clues which will guide us in making our judgment about him and his church. Becoming existentially involved with our subject hopefully will not prevent us from dealing honestly with it. Indeed, it should force us to deal more seriously with the data. We will return to this basic question in our concluding chapter.

Felix Manalo Crosses His Rubicon (November, 1913)

An important factor in becoming a "prophet" in biblical times or today is a definite experience of being "called" by God. Isaiah and Paul are instructive biblical examples. Martin Luther and Charles Wesley both experienced God in such a life-changing way that it led them to launch movements which became great churches and changed Christian history in dramatic ways. Haliburton describes Prophet Harris' call which he experienced in a jail cell in Cape Palmas, Liberia, when he believed God had sent the archangel Gabriel to commission him as a prophet.

For Felix Manalo the turning point came in the early part of November, 1913. After his brief association with sceptics and freethinkers, Manalo had resumed intensive study of Scriptures. A strong conviction began to build up that he must study the Bible for himself, find out what it taught about the Church of Christ, then act obediently on what he found out. Garcia says that his great purpose now was to end religious disunity (1964:181).

The unity of the Church through return to New Testament practices had been a cardinal teaching of the Christian Church missionaries for those years. Unity as a goal may seem strange to outsiders who have often seen Manalo as the great divider in the Philippines. But Teodoro Santiago, a close associate of Manalo for thirty-seven years before he left the church, agrees with Garcia. He told me in an interview that Manalo's real purpose in starting the church was to establish a new church which would not fracture or splinter and would indeed "think the same thing."

Manalo's years of searching among many denominations brought him to a place in his own experience where he believed that the only answer was to begin anew. He believed strongly that there was one true Church, and

since he had not found it in all his searching, he would have to begin it himself. It was especially clear to him that the one church which claimed to be the only true Church, the Roman Catholic Church, could not possibly be the true one because it had departed so totally from the Bible.

The pressure upon him became so great that he felt he had to get by himself and work this problem through by study and prayer. So he closeted himself in a room at home and told his wife very sternly not to disturb him in any way. Obediently she did, until after two days and three nights she became so worried that she finally knocked on the door. Felix became very angry, but his anger changed to amazement when he was told how long he had been working in the room. Garcia, his official biographer, does not describe this experience in any supernaturalistic or other-worldly terms. Manalo saw no visions, he entertained no angels, he felt no unusual physical sensations other than obliviousness to the passage of time. Garcia attributes this to his intense concentration, the result of which, she says, was "quite a pile of paper" on which were recorded the thoughts that had come to him during this experience (1964:181).

This "closet" experience was the climax of a process, not the "moment of truth" when suddenly the idea of a new church came to Manalo. The strongest evidence for this is found in the testimony of his wife, Honorata. She indicates that the idea of starting an "Iglesia ni Cristo" had been simmering in his mind for some time even while he was still with the Seventh Day Adventists. The 50th Anniversary Edition of the *Pasugo* magazine reports her story.

Before Brother Felix Manalo gave himself to preaching the true and pure Gospel, they, hus-

band and wife, were both members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (Sabadista). One night Brother Manalo confided to her his purpose to begin the preaching of the Church of Christ (*Iglesia ni Cristo*). He also told her of his purpose to attract his fellow (Adventist) pastors, and the pastors of other sects to agree to preach the Church of Christ. Sister 'Ata did not object to this beautiful purpose of her husband.

But his fellow pastors did not agree with Brother Manalo. They laughed at Brother Manalo, and called him a *colorum* ("underground"). Because of this Brother Manalo separated from the Adventists. (Punzalan and Gaddi, 1964:44, translated from the original Tagalog by the author.)

Not only does Honorata's testimony show that Manalo had been thinking about starting the *Iglesia ni Cristo* for quite some time, it also adds another dimension to the controversy as to why Manalo separated, or was separated, from the Adventists. Since he was urging them to join him in starting a new church, the Adventist missionary and other paid workers would certainly have considered him subversive.

Manalo's decision to begin a new Church of Christ was a fairly long process which culminated in his three-day closet experience. That was the great turning point. Manalo frequently told the story to friends and audiences. One thing that seemed to have crystallized in Manalo's thinking during this experience was that as he began to preach the new message, he must proceed in an apostolic manner. He understood this to mean that he would have to begin his ministry with no money or certain source of support. Sta. Romana reports that after Manalo had eaten, he told his wife that if they studied and learned the teachings of the Bible, they should live by the Bible, and they would be taken care of by God (1955:374). Other

Christians would have said that if you go out "by faith," God will supply all of your needs.

And go out by faith they did. Manalo said to his wife, "Tayo na!" ("Let's go!"). And Honorata tells how they went.

Before Brother Manalo began to preach the Church of Christ, he first gave all of his livelihood to his helper (Eusebio Sunga). He did not take any money with him at all. He wanted God to perform a miracle in his life. Therefore, when they were going to Punta, Sta. Ana, for their crossing of the river they had nothing to pay the boatman. They only promised that they would pay on their return trip. And God did not fail them. Among those who listened to Brother Manalo's meeting there were those who graciously gave to them what they needed, including a place to stay. They even gave fare for the boatman.

Thus when Manalo crossed his "Rubicon," the Pasig River in Manila, on that fateful day in November, 1913, he did not even have his boat fare! Or at least not all of it. Teodoro Santiago's version of this story which he says he heard Manalo tell is that Manalo had enough (two cents) for his own fare, so he left his wife behind, crossed over and contacted his Christian Mission friends on the other side, and they gave him the fare for his wife. But all of the other sources insist that Manalo left Pasay carrying absolutely no money. In either case, when Manalo began preaching he was trusting entirely in God.

This whole experience has great meaning for our investigation, especially because one of our basic questions is, "Was Manalo sincere in saying he was called to begin the *Iglesia ni Cristo*? Or was he a fraud who simply started a new religion as a means to easy wealth?" (This is a very common view among non-*Iglesia* Filipinos, "*Hanap-buhay lang iyan!*" "That's just a way to make a living!").

The facts of the case just recounted belie this contention. Manalo surely had no assurance that he would become rich; and if money were the object, he would not have given away his entire livelihood. His basic sincerity at that point must be granted. His motivation was no doubt mixed, including a strong abhorrence of being under anyone else's direction. But his closet experience and penniless crossing of the Pasig show that at that time Manalo was sincerely trying to follow God's will, as he understood it from his study of the Bible.

Early Days and Church Organization

When Felix Manalo and his wife went to Punta, Sta. Ana in Manila, they were going to familiar territory. Manalo had been there before, first as a Christian Mission worker, and then as a member of the first Philippine Seventh Day Adventist Church which was also located in Sta. Ana. Arriving there again in early November, 1913, Manalo immediately contacted some Christian Mission friends who set up a meeting for him in the compound of the Atlantic Gulf and Pacific Company, a large American-owned construction firm in Manila. Only about four or five persons, apparently all members of the Christian Mission Church attended this first meeting in a small room in the workers' quarters of the Atlantic Gulf compound (Garcia, 1964:181). One of them, Tomas Diosinito, overseer of these quarters, offered Manalo and his wife a room and gave them some food.

The meetings continued every evening and soon the attendance began to grow as news of Manalo's preaching spread. The meetings were moved out into the open air as listeners increased but most of the sympathizers continued to be old friends from the Christian Mission. As a result of these nightly meetings, twelve converts were

baptized in an early month of 1914. The sources do not indicate if Christian Mission members who joined Manalo were rebaptized. They may not have been since Teodoro Santiago reports that the first congregation in Punta numbered about twenty-seven members. Among these first members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* were Frederico Inocencio who became the new Church's first ordained minister (other than Manalo) and Atanacio Morte who became its first deacon and secretary. Both of these men survived until the fiftieth anniversary of the church (Punzalan and Gaddi, 1964:43,44).

What were the subjects of Manalo's preaching during these early founding days of the Church? I asked this question of Teodoro Santiago who joined the *Iglesia ni Cristo* only a year after its founding. He answered that Manalo preached against the vices (gambling and drinking; tobacco is not considered a vice in the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, since it is not mentioned in the Bible). From the beginning Manalo vigorously attacked the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. He also spoke on such Bible topics as "Body, Soul, and Spirit," "The New Heavens and New Earth," and "Where Are the Dead?" Sta. Romana says that he also attacked the Sabbatarian doctrines of the Adventists.

Contrary to the impression given by Sta. Romana, the new church did not grow rapidly at first. But Manalo was determined to see its congregations multiplied. Soon after his daughter Pilar's birth (March 10, 1914), he left the small church in Punta in the care of Inocencio and Morte and went to his hometown Tipas, Taguig, to continue his preaching there. Not to wait for the first congregation to become large before starting a second is sound church-planting strategy. And going back to one's hometown probably assures an initial audience, though it may expose the

preacher to the danger of being a prophet without honor in his own town.

Fierce opposition to his teachings broke out in Tipas. Kavanagh gives the impression that Manalo was not able to get a foothold there and says that none of his close relatives were converted to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* (n.d.:6). That no close relatives were converted is apparently true, but it is not true that Manalo was unable to start a congregation in Tipas during those early days. The fact is that the Tipas congregation was the second one founded by Manalo. In the secretary's affidavit accompanying the Articles of Incorporation, Morte lists five members (besides Felix and his wife, Honorata) who were living in Taguig. Three members (all ladies) of this early Taguig congregation survived to see the fiftieth anniversary of the church (Punzalan and Gaddi, 1964:45).

Garcia indicates that the persecutors accused Manalo of propagating an illegal religion since his church had not yet been incorporated. This spurred Manalo to move ahead with this important matter. With the help of Attorney Juan Trinidad the Articles of Incorporation (in Spanish) were filed with the Office of the Division of Archives, Patented Properties of Literature and Executive Office of Industrial Trade Marks. Today a certified true copy of these papers is on file with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Manila. The original was destroyed in a fire during the war.

In these papers Felix Manalo as applicant states his desire to convert the "Society named 'Iglesia ni Kristo' into a unipersonal corporation" (or "corporation sole"). This meant that as "head of the said society, he takes charge and is the administrator of all the properties and states of said society." In Roman Catholic countries this is a familiar type of incorporation for religious societies, since the

bishops in the Roman Church have this type of power. In the secretary's affidavit, Atanacio Morte states that the society shall be known as the "**Iglesia ni Kristo**" (Note the original use of "K" in "**Kristo**." For some reason the *Iglesia ni Cristo* now prefers "C"), and that the objective of the society was "to propagate the doctrines and teachings of the GOSPEL OF CHRIST in the whole Philippine archipelago, and that its existence depends on PUBLIC CHARITY" (capitals in original).

The officers of the new corporation were "Pastor or Supreme Head," Felix Manalo; Pedro Inocencio, Bishop; Tomas de la Cruz, Evangelist; Atanacio Morte, Secretary; Vicente Reyes, Treasurer; Serapio Dionisio, Deacon; Engracia Ramos and Honorata G. Manalo, Deaconesses.

The Bible was given an important place in the new church. "In case of any vacancy," read the articles, "of any of the positions mentioned, they will be replaced in conformity with the precepts of the Holy Bible." But the authority of the "Pastor," Felix Manalo, is also underlined in the provision that he is "empowered to organize local committees in various places in the Philippine Islands as he deems it necessary." In Spanish the term is "**comites locales**," and it is interesting that even today the *Iglesia* refers to its local congregations as "**locales**," i.e., committees of the corporation!

Since the *Iglesia* places such a strong emphasis upon the date of their incorporation (which, they say, accords with prophecy), we should comment on the dating of these papers. Mortes' affidavit is dated July 13, 1914. It was notarized on July 24, 1914. The original papers have been lost in fire, but the Securities and Exchange Commission in Manila has an official certification of the fact that the original Articles of Incorporation of the **Iglesia ni Kristo**

were "duly filed on the twenty-seventh day of July, Anno Domini nineteen hundred and fourteen" (July 27, 1914). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* claims that this date coincided exactly with the date of the beginning of the First World War (see Pasugo, July, 1970, Editorial). According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 23, page 690, the Austrian minister Berchtold persuaded Francis Joseph to authorize a declaration of war against Serbia on July 27, and war was actually declared on July 28, 1914. Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914, and the situation grew rapidly worse after that. The coincidence of the dates is striking, but was not noticed by Manalo at the time.

First Outreaches: Rizal, Manila

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* had been in existence about eight months when it was officially incorporated in July, 1914. It then consisted of only two small congregations. The first at Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila, and the second at Tipas, Taguig, Rizal. The total baptized membership was probably less than fifty. Many were listening to the preaching of Manalo and his companions, but opposition was stiff.

The meetings in Tipas continued in spite of the opposition with the result that several former antagonists were converted. One of these, Justino Casanova, a former Christian Mission pastor, became Manalo's right hand man during these early years.

After the rainy season (about November, 1914) Manalo moved on to Pateros, the town adjoining Taguig, where he again conducted nightly meetings. The pace Manalo had set for himself took its toll, and he began to show symptoms of tuberculosis. This dread disease is the Philippine's number one killer, and is endemic in this country. But

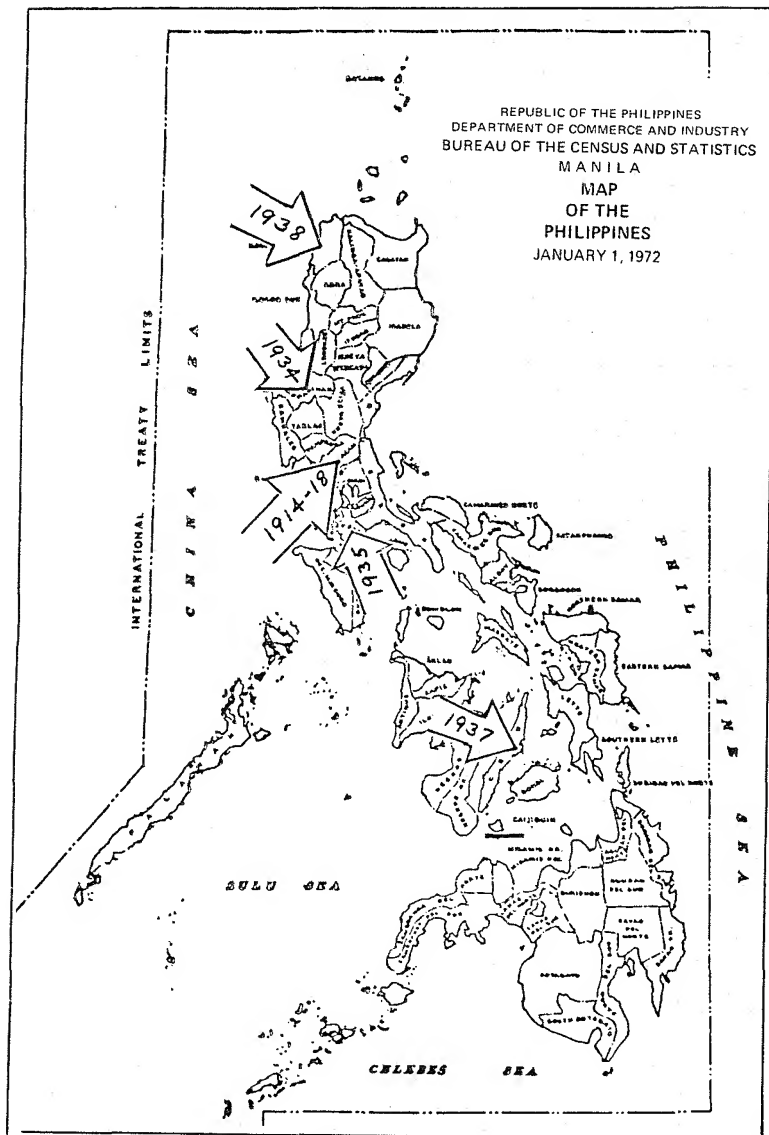


Figure 1: Map of Philippines Showing Directions of Early Iglesia Growth

staying with the Kagalingan family in Pateros, Manalo nursed himself back to health in a few months time.

How large was the new church at the close of 1914? It only had two small congregations and a new outreach. Its membership was still probably less than one hundred members. This is much less than the 1,000 which Sta. Romana credits to it by the end of that year.

During the next hot season (March through May, 1915), health much improved, Manalo held meetings in barrios Buting, Pulo, and Rosario of Pasig, Rizal. Manalo's strategy at this time was simply to move ahead from one town to the next, holding meetings in barrios which opened to him. It was during these meetings at Pulo that Teodoro Santiago was converted. Teodoro Santiago who for many years was number three man in the *Iglesia* hierarchy was twenty years old at the time. A few years previous to meeting Manalo, he had read Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* ("Touch Me Not," known to English readers as *The Social Cancer*). This book is a scathing attack on Spanish Roman Catholicism as it was practiced in the Philippines during the 19th century. As a result of reading this book, Santiago left Roman Catholicism and joined the Aglipayan Church. In Pulo, Pasig, Santiago went to hear Felix Manalo every night. One night Manalo said to him, "Bata! Sumama ka sa akin, at palaganapin natin ito!" ("Friend! Come with me and let's spread this teaching!") Santiago says he was baptized by Manalo in Tondo, Manila.

According to Garcia, the work in Tondo began in the latter months of 1915. Manalo had befriended Quintin Rivera, a vendor at a small market in Tondo, and began nightly meetings by the open window of his house. Soon the attendance at the meetings grew and leaders of other denominations became involved in the discussions. These

included **IEMELIF**, the Christian Mission, and the Philippine Independent Church. A temporary chapel made of nipa palm and sawali (a native woven material) was built to house the new congregation in Tondo and serve as headquarters for the church administration. This lasted until 1926 when fire destroyed the chapel, and the congregation was divided into four house churches.

By the end of 1915 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had seven local congregations. Most of these were still in the house-church stage, and the total membership was probably three hundred or less. The important thing was that an association of closely knit congregations was being built up which formed the base of future expansion. Manalo was also training ministers who would work under him. His basic method which has proven very effective through the years was to train by apprenticeship. Men studying under Manalo would accompany him night after night to his various meetings. They observed his methods and heard his messages over and over again until they had them memorized. Some of his top ministers, such as Casanova, had had previous training in Bruce Kershner's Bible College before joining Manalo and probably helped him as he developed his approach.

Beginnings in Bulacan Province and Central Luzon

In 1916 we see a new development in the outreach of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. ' For the first time the church expanded out of the greater Manila area; and for the first time also, the spearhead was composed of men serving under Manalo, not by Manalo himself.

The first opening in Bulacan, a province lying north of Manila, began in the barrio of Tabi in the town of Guiguinto. Here again as we have seen before and will see

many times again, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* made its first entrance into a new province through a barrio. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* followed a "center" philosophy of church planting (i.e., plant churches first in the governmental or commercial centers, then move out into the smaller towns and barrios) only when it began its first congregation in Manila, the center of Philippine life, in 1913. It is doubtful if that was a conscious strategic move. After that human contacts formed the bridges across which the church moved as it entered new areas and provinces. The fact that it appealed mainly to the uneducated masses in those early days also led it to enter the barrios first.

Who this key contact was in barrio Tabi, our source does not reveal, though we may have a hint. It does tell us who the workers were. Justino Casanova, Santiago Lopez, and Teodoro Santiago began to hold meetings in the barrio; and the meetings resulted in thirty baptisms. These newly baptized members were then organized into a "local." Worship services were begun in the house of Benedicto Lopez. Could this Lopez have been a relative of the worker, Santiago Lopez? We do not know, but it would be very likely. How would a house suddenly be made available to those men preaching a strong message, unless it was the house of a relative or close friend? If our hypothesis is correct, Lopez would be the natural contact on which the new church was built.

This congregation continued to grow until it reached about eighty members. The meeting place had to be changed because of the growth of the membership, and it was not long until they were able to build a small chapel of wood with a corrugated iron roof.

This Bulacan congregation was apparently the only new one begun in years 1916 and 1917. Thus by the end

of 1917 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had about eight local congregations and about five hundred members.

In 1918 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* took another significant step forward, this time into a new language area. In that year three workers, Bernardo Turla, Benito Simbillo, and Reymundo Mansilungan, began meetings in barrio San Isidro, in the town of Bacolor, Pampanga. Up to that time all of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* work had been among Tagalog people. Many people in Pampanga could understand Tagalog, but their home language was **Kapampangan**, another Philippine language. Pampanga lies in the great central rice-producing plain of Central Luzon. For decades, and even centuries, this area has been plagued by agrarian problems. It has always been heavily populated, and most of the people have been poor peasant farmers living at the mercy of their landowners. Since the Second World War it, along with other Central Luzon provinces, has been the center of dissident activities. The communist-led **Huk**, and more recently, the New People's army have drawn most of their strength from these provinces.

In Central Luzon, outside of Manila, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has had its greatest growth. This became apparent even in those very early years. Not only was a congregation started in barrio San Isidro with twenty baptized believers, but in that same year another "local" was begun in Sto. Tomas. The next year (1920), four. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* had discovered a responsive population and unhampered by comity was converting it.

Coming back to the year 1918 and to the greater Manila area, a new congregation was begun that year in Tenejeros, Malabon, Rizal, just north of Manila. Justino Casanova was the pioneer again in this outreach. He held his meetings in front of a large house and thirty were converted

to the *Iglesia*. Again a familiar story was repeated. Worship services began in one home, but soon had to be transferred to another location because of the increasing attendance. The church had to be transferred yet a third time for the same reason.

About this time a church formerly connected with another mission joined forces with the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. This was the Ugong, Pasig, Rizal, Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church which was a fruit of the labors of Manalo's friend, Bruce Kershner. Teodoro Santiago married a daughter of one of the leading families in this church, and he reports that after Kershner left for the United States in 1917 this church moved into the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. It seems likely that Manalo's new church—at this stage—looked very much like a "Christian Church." Since his friendship with Kershner continued for years, it seems probable that Kershner also regarded him as not far from the Kingdom!

Thus at the end of 1918 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had about twelve local churches with a total membership of probably less than a thousand. Most of the churches, we should remember, were still meeting in homes. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* was not at that time an affluent church, some of these local congregations were soon able to construct at least simple chapels.

Manalo's First Trip to the United States (1919)

Apparently, the difficult task of defending his new church against increasing attacks convinced Felix Manalo that he needed further training in the United States. Also the matter of prestige may have been an important consideration in this decision, for as study in Germany was often looked on as the required finishing touch for an American scholar, so in the Philippines, study in the United

States usually established a person as an authority in his chosen field.

In 1919 Felix Manalo enrolled in "the Pacific School of Religion in California" for one year's study. Sanders reports that the congregational school of that name in Berkeley can find no record of Manalo's enrollment or attendance there (1969:353). I asked Teodoro Santiago about this, and he said that Manalo definitely studied in the United States in 1919, and that Manalo said that the name of the school was the Pacific School of Religion. Santiago also said that Manalo would often regale his associates with stories concerning his experiences at this school. He would tell of being in classes with Japanese and Indian students. They would sometimes get into arguments; and once, Manalo reported, a Japanese threw an ink bottle at him. But apparently they made up afterwards, because they were "good sports."

Of his study in America, then, there can be little doubt, though we may be less sure of the name of the institution. (It seems strange that he—a vigorous immersionist—would go to a congregational school). Sta. Romana says his expenses were paid for by the young church in the Philippines (1955:337). She also reports that while he was abroad Manalo collected many religious books, encyclopedias, and different versions of the Bible which later adorned his office. He was to put these volumes to good use in his debates with his opponents through the years.

Return and Trouble in the Church (Ora Rebellion): 1920-1922

When Manalo returned from the United States he plunged into a training program for his young workers to care for the multiplying congregations. But all was not

well in the church. "Jealousy, Envy, Dissatisfaction began showing their ugly heads," Garcia says (1964:181).

Some of the problems were only minor but may have been symptomatic. Santiago says that while Manalo was in the United States, Casanova began midweek services on Wednesdays. When Manalo arrived he questioned Casanova about this innovation. Casanova replied that he began these meetings because the members were beginning to go to the movies and neglect the work of the church. They needed a meeting between Sundays to keep them spiritually warm. Apparently convinced, Manalo retained the midweek meeting but changed the day from Wednesday to Thursday, possibly to reassert his authority.

Other problems were more serious. Garcia reports that a whispering campaign was launched against Manalo's moral integrity. This is interesting in the light of similar charges which had been made against Manalo when he was separated from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and would be made periodically through his life. Manalo's answer to this attack is revealing. Garcia says that he faced his accusers in a stormy session and strongly maintained the invulnerability of the church's doctrines, even though he did not pretend to personal infallibility (1964:181). This line of reasoning was not original, of course. It has been the steady position of the Roman Catholic Church regarding its priests. The validity of a priest's ministry or performance of the sacraments is clearly separated from any question of his personal holiness. The Church is infallible, though the men who lead the Church are very human and fallible. Manalo apparently took a similar stand.

These problems definitely affected the growth of the young church. Garcia admits that some members separated. The troubles apparently reached their most serious proportions in the "Ora Rebellion" of 1922.

This serious blow to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was led by Teofilo Ora, a pioneer *Iglesia* minister, and Basilio Santiago, another worker (see Pasugo, July 27, 1964:120). Both had been assigned to the Bulacan area. The congregation at Tabi, Guiguinto, had grown to eighty members and had built its own chapel. The rebellion of these two workers caused such a rupture that those who separated from the *Iglesia* even took back the furniture that they had donated and the chapel itself was given to the public school of Guiguinto. Of the eighty members only fifteen remained. According to Santiago, this revolt was related to charges of immorality against Manalo.

The revolt spread to the province of Nueva Ecija and virtually destroyed the new work there. (In 1917 Felix Manalo himself, along with Teodoro Santiago and Junuerio Ponce, had held meetings in that province, but with no result. In 1919 Ponce returned and this time a congregation was begun in barrio San Lorenzo, Gapan. This congregation also grew to eighty members, but when Teofilo Ora led his rebellion against Manalo, Ponce sided with him; and this entire "local" dissolved. Only one member remained faithful.)

Development of "God's Messenger" Doctrine (1922)

Thus, in 1922 Manalo faced a crucial challenge to his authority from within his church. It was about this time that Manalo introduced a new doctrine which was to become the cornerstone of the entire doctrinal structure of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. The doctrine affirms Manalo's position as "Sugo" or "God's Messenger" in fulfillment of the prophecy in Revelation 7:1-3. It provided a firm doctrinal foundation for his authority. The emergence of this doctrine at this particular time could hardly have been coinci-

dental. It is reasonable to assume that it grew out of Manalo's determination to establish supreme authority over the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

This doctrine has been the subject of numerous Pasugo articles and the target of most of the written attacks against the church. We will deal with it more in detail in the chapter on *Iglesia ni Cristo* doctrines. Here we simply state the teaching and tell how it developed.

As Manalo reflected on the circumstances surrounding his founding of the *Iglesia*, he came to the conclusion that the dating was not coincidental. Rather it proved that his action was in direct fulfillment of prophecy. He believed that chapter six of Revelation spoke of a great war, and that the reference to men hiding in caves (Rev. 6:15) pictured men hiding in air raid shelters. He concluded that this war must have been the then recently concluded First World War. In Revelation 7:1 John goes on to describe four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds. Manalo explained that winds in prophecy always referred to wars, and angels can refer to human messengers (*Iglesia* writers devote much space in demonstrating that the Greek word, "angelos" has the primary meaning of "messenger"). So these four angels must be the "Big Four" of the First World War, Lloyd George of Great Britain, Clemenceau of France, Orlando of Italy, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States. These four held back the winds of war by the Armistice which made it possible for the other angel mentioned in Revelation 7:2 to ascend from the east, "having the seal of the living God." This "angel of the east" was none other than Felix Manalo who began his ascent on July 27, 1914. This angel's commission, according to Manalo, was to reestablish the Church of Christ in the Philippines, the Far East of prophecy.

This doctrine raises many exegetical problems, but it solved a very practical problem for the *Iglesia ni Cristo* leadership. They had believed that Felix Manalo was the "Sugo," the special messenger of God. But how could they prove his claims against those of other churches who also claimed to be Churches of Christ? Now the answer was clear. The true "Sugo" is the one who fulfills Bible prophecy. No other religious group in the Philippines claimed that their founder was the fulfillment of these prophecies in Revelation. The position of Manalo was unshakeable. So Manalo believed, and so believed his followers.

With Manalo's authority clearly established by the "Angel" doctrine, disloyalty firmly purged from the ranks, and all property owned by the Supreme Head, the church was ready for its first period of really rapid growth. The *Iglesia* was never again seriously threatened by schism.

In spite of the Ora rebellion, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had at least twenty-nine local congregations in 1922, and the membership was probably around 3,000. The summary of year-by-year growth for this period is as follows.

Table 1
Iglesia ni Cristo Growth
1914-1922

Year	Total No. of Locals	Approx. No. of Members	New Areas Entered
1914	2	100	Punta, Manila; Tipas, Rizal
1915	7	300	Tondo; Pasig, Rizal
1916	8	350	Bulacan
1917	8	500	
1918	12	1,000	Pampanga
1919	16	1,500	Nueva Ecija
1920	20	2,000	Pasay; Sampaloc
1921	31	3,000	Caloocan; Sta. Ana
1922	29	2,800	Tarlac

Accelerated Growth: 1923-1945

Expansion in Central Luzon

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* reached into the Central Luzon area early in its history. Bulacan was entered in 1916, and Pampanga in 1918. But rapid growth did not take place in these areas until after the Ora Rebellion of 1922. Teodoro Santiago reports that he was assigned to spearhead the *Iglesia* advance in Pampanga that same year. According to his account, when he began his work there the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had no congregation in that province; but we have already seen that the official history of the *Iglesia* in Pampanga (Pasugo, July 27, 1964:122) lists thirteen locals which had been established there by 1923. The record does confirm that the congregation in Angeles City (where Santiago was assigned) was begun in 1923. Subsequent growth was rapid and Pampanga was made a separate division administratively in 1924 with Santiago assigned as District Minister (the Pasugo lists him as Division Minister only until 1926). Santiago reports that when he left the province in 1929, thirty-eight locals had been established. Thus the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had tripled in size in that province in only six years.

The story of the opening of the work in Tarlac province is especially interesting because its roots go back to the time before Felix Manalo founded the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. A certain tailor from Manila, Francisco Pangilinan, moved to barrio Baluto, Concepcion, Tarlac, to set up a tailoring shop. He first was associated with Manalo when the latter still worked for the Christian Mission. After the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was founded Pangilinan listened to its teachings, but had never been baptized. One day in Baluto a Catholic, Cecilio Angeles, invited Pangilinan to accompany him to a Pro-

testant meeting. Instead of going with him, Pangilinan invited Angeles to come to his tailor shop for a Bible study instead. Pangilinan explained the *Iglesia ni Cristo* teachings from the Bible. Soon the attendance at these studies increased until Pangilinan wrote Manalo to send a minister to them. Manalo answered by sending Teodoro Santiago in October, 1922. In November twelve were baptized. The new congregation began meeting in the Angeles home, but the ironic twist of this story is that Pangilinan still did not follow through to baptism and seemed to "disappear" soon after.

Locals multiplied rapidly in Tarlac and by 1925 it was made a separate division. Possibly, Teodoro Santiago confused his experience in Pampanga with his work in Tarlac, for though some locals existed in Pampanga before he was assigned there, he did establish the first one in neighboring Tarlac.

By the end of the 1920's multiplication of congregations had resumed in Bulacan and Nueva Ecija, the two provinces hit by the Ora rebellion. In 1929 work also began in Bataan province and in 1931 a local was starting in Subic Bay, Zambales. The *Iglesia* did not move into what has since proven to be one of their most fruitful areas, the province of Pangasinan, until 1934. By 1969 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had more locals in this province (139) than in any other. Our sources do not give any indication for the unusual receptivity of this non-Tagalog province.

By the end of the 1930's the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was firmly established and multiplying congregations in all of the provinces of Central Luzon. The fact that the church expanded more quickly northward than southward may be partly due to the number of natural bridges which existed in those early days between existing congregations and these ripe areas. But social and economic factors cannot

be overlooked. The political scientist, Ando, points out that the fact of the *Iglesia's* rapid expansion in the barrios of these Central Luzon provinces reflected the unsettled agrarian conditions under which the people were living. They were actively seeking answers to their economic, as well as religious problems (1969:334). Membership in the *Iglesia* gave them an identity and a sense of power meaningful to these peasants.

Expansion into Southern Luzon

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* did not reach southward from Manila until 1925, more than ten years after its founding. Its real expansion there did not occur until the latter part of the 1930's. Part of the reason for not entering this area earlier was, no doubt, lack of time and shortage of workers. Garcia mentions that the church's poor finances forced it to follow the geographical order of the provinces in the expansion of the church (1964:182). But the reason why the *Iglesia* moved north first rather than south may be that the Christian Mission and the Seventh Day Adventists, two denominations with whom Manalo had been previously associated, both had strong works in the southern Tagalog area. In fact, it was in these provinces that the followers of Manalo had to identify their chapels by the words, "*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1914," to distinguish them from the "*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1901," the churches of the Christian Mission. These latter churches were by this time led by missionary Leslie Wolfe who had separated from the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS) in 1926, and was leading an aggressive Church of Christ movement in the Philippines during that period.

Despite its rather late start the outreach into Cavite province, just south of Manila, began with a great campaign which bore much fruit. A member of the Pasay local who was from Bacoor, Cavite, invited an *Iglesia* worker

to hold meetings in his home barrio. Felix Manalo decided to send a large force there instead of just the one worker requested. The big names of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* were all included: Frederico Inocencio, Justino Casanova, Teodoro Santiago, Feliciano Gonzales, Benito Simbillo, and Bernardo Turla made up the team. The results were as impressive as the team. One hundred baptisms launched the new church in Bacoar.

The province of Laguna was entered next with the beginning of a new church in Biñan in 1928. The outstanding leader in this work was an American Negro-Filipino mestizo, Andres Tucker. Tucker is still a leading figure in *Iglesia* circles, though he has been in and out of favor with the church authorities at various times in his long career.

Both Batangas and Quezon provinces were entered in 1935. The opening meetings in Batangas, Batangas were marked by severe disorder. Attempts were made to break up the meetings by stoning and rioting. A special feature of this meeting was a debate between an Adventist leader and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* minister, Cortes. On January 13, 1936 one of the largest baptismal services ever held up to that time was conducted with Felix Manalo personally attending. The total number baptized that day was 137.

The first baptism in Lucena, Quezon by contrast consisted of only ten individuals. But in spite of the small beginning the *Iglesia* has steadily grown in that province and now numbers about twice the number of all the Protestants there. Protestant work in Quezon began in 1906, about thirty years before the *Iglesia* entered.

Expansion into Northern Luzon: 1938

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* did not enter the Ilocos area of Northern Luzon until 1938. Distance, preoccupation with other works, and language difference were probably the

main reasons for this late entry. The story of how the work began is instructive because it points up again the importance of following natural leads in church planting.

The story begins with an Ilocano family and two single girls who were former members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in Cavite but returned home to barrio Lanao, Bangui, Ilocos Norte. Because there was no place for them to worship there they requested the central office to send them a minister. Manalo responded by transferring an Ilocano-speaking minister from Pangasinan who led in the propaganda efforts. Twenty-one people were baptized as a result. A new congregation was born, and a province opened.

The work in Northern Luzon did not progress rapidly before the war. Ilocos Sur was not entered until 1945, after Liberation. Still a beginning had been made among the Ilocanos.

Beginnings in Central Visayas, Cebu: 1937

We have mentioned that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* strategy was to press forward by following natural contacts. It did not usually enter the center of a province first. An exception was the opening of a church in the Central Visayan area of the Philippines. Up to this time its efforts had been limited to the main island of Luzon. Now it determined to move south to Cebu City. This important move showed that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* planned to make itself a nation-wide movement. So in April, 1937 Felix Manalo sent Alipio Apolonio to the historic City of Cebu. Presumably, Apolonio was a Cebuano since Tagalog is not spoken in Cebu.

Pasugo records the unusual development of Apolonio's meetings (see Pasugo, July 27, 1964:145). Since no one opened yard or grounds to him, Apolonio began his meet-

ings on a side street. The first evening, the members of an *Iglesia Universal de Cristo* attended and asked to be allowed to help by singing at the meetings. The next night, members of the Presbyterian Church also attended, and likewise requested to be allowed to sing. For more than a week they helped bring people to these meetings by their enthusiastic singing until finally their pastor, a Mr. Smith, stopped them and then entered into a debate with the *Iglesia* worker. The meetings continued and forty-seven were in the first baptism—probably, Presbyterians and other Christians who were convinced by the debates that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was the truer, more biblical church. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* apparently grew quite rapidly within the city but not out into the surrounding provincial area during these early days.

In 1938 a congregation was also begun on the island of Bohol, a strong Presbyterian field. Here again a debate was held with a Presbyterian pastor, and apparently, the first members of the *Iglesia* in that province (twelve individuals) were Protestants who were convinced of the *Iglesia's* position in the debate. *Iglesia* progress seems to have been especially slow in this province. It was not made a separate division until 1955, nearly twenty years later.

Felix Manalo's Second United States Trip: 1938

During the pre-war years the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was growing rapidly in many areas, but it apparently had some financial problems. Many local congregations had to meet in homes or simple make-shift chapels. It was a movement of the masses, and large sums of money were not forthcoming. Garcia tells of Manalo's desire to build a central chapel where members from different divisions of the church could come together for special services (1964:182).

This proved to be beyond the financial capabilities of the church at that time, and Manalo decided on a fund-raising trip to the United States. Another purpose of this trip was medical, to care for an intestinal ailment.

To help him set up a schedule of meetings, Felix Manalo contacted his old friend, Bruce Kershner, then teaching at Butler University. So in the latter part of 1938 Felix Manalo and Cirilo Gonzales, secretary of the church and Manalo's interpreter, left for Indiana in the United States. Unfortunately, Manalo was only able to keep a few of his engagements in the United States. He became very ill soon after arrival. Santiago relates that Manalo came back from the trip very discouraged. His only warm memory was that of seeing his friend Kershner. He told how he was warmly greeted by Kershner in Tagalog which he still remembered. Garcia says Manalo interpreted his experience to mean that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* must be completely self-supporting and never again look abroad for help (1964:183).

The Founding of "Pasugo" Magazine

A very significant development at this time was the founding of the magazine, *Pasugo*. The first issue came out in February, 1939 with Teodoro Santiago as editor. The word "*Pasugo*" refers to the message which a "sugo" or messenger brings, and is loosely translated by the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as "God's Message." The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has not produced a large amount of other printed material, but ever since its founding, this magazine has been its primary written instrument of indoctrination and propagation of its teaching. When I asked Cipriano Sandoval, currently Administrative Secretary of the church, whether or not ordinary members are encouraged to own and read the Bible,

he answered rather obliquely, "They have **Pasugo!**" This indicates the central importance of the magazine in the life of the church.

This magazine was published for three years before the war, then publication stopped and did not resume until January, 1951 (Santiago, Benjamin, 1964:47-49). Benjamin Santiago is the present editor. Though his account differs from that of Teodoro Santiago (who stated that *Pasugo* resumed publication in 1949), it is consistent with the volume numberings of the magazine.

The Second World War

On December 8, 1941 Japanese bombers attacked the Philippines and soon they invaded the islands. After a short but bitter struggle the Philippines fell to the Japanese in April, 1942. The work of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, like that of other churches, was deeply affected.

The Japanese occupation government proposed that all Protestant denominations unite in one organization. Garcia says that Felix Manalo was approached by Japanese authorities to effect such a union, but he refused (1964:183). Actually, it seems that Enrique C. Sobrepeña was the moving spirit behind the actual union that did take place, and was elected as their presiding bishop (Gowing, 1967: 170). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* was never included in this union. Garcia says that Manalo became so suspect by the Japanese that he had to avoid public appearances and would send his assistants to represent him at official functions. Aggressive propagation of the teachings of the *Iglesia* was greatly hindered by the unsettled and difficult conditions. Manalo, however, kept his church administration intact and was ready to move ahead again once the war was over. The war affected the life of all Philippine churches by scat-

tering their members into the remote areas and different islands. This proved a blessing in disguise for the churches because it led to the geographical expansion of many churches after the war. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* fully capitalized on this development, as we shall see.

At the end of thirty years the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had grown from a struggling little group in Manila to a large, powerful church which covered most of Luzon, and had entered the Visayan islands. Its membership had reached possibly 40,000 which made it comparable with the United Evangelical Church. Among Protestants only the Methodist Church was larger in pre-war Philippines. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* was despised by other churches because of the low social class of its members, its aggressive and "ungentlemanly" methods of propagation, and its "ridiculous" claims to being founded by the fifth angel! Other churches greatly underestimated the growth and significance of this independent church which was making great headway in the cities and barrios of the Philippines. Politicians, however, were beginning to take notice. President Quezon of the Commonwealth was already befriending Manalo and set a pattern which post-independence politicians were to follow.

All this was not lost on Felix Manalo. True to his name, he was determined to be "number one." He had come a long way from the time when as a young man he had crossed the Pasig River, penniless and without followers. But the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* greatest days were yet to come.

CHAPTER 4

LATER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Rapid Growth Period: 1945-1963

Philippine-wide Expansion

Liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese began when MacArthur's troops landed on Leyte Island on October 19, 1944. Ten months later the war was over, and reconstruction could begin. The Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant denominations launched massive aid programs designed to help their impoverished congregations in the Philippines reestablish themselves and rebuild their destroyed buildings. Gowing relates how the Philippine Independent Church was left in a desperate plight because it had no stateside counterpart to raise funds for it (1967: 172). Nor did the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, but we have already seen how Manalo had already decided not to look again to the United States for aid.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo*, unlike the Philippine Independent Church, was not broken in spirit and rent by division. Manalo had kept his church intact, and he was firmly in control. It was now ready to enter into its greatest period of growth and nationwide expansion. This period was not to be without problems to be sure, for there were to be defections and leadership struggles within, as well as attacks on his teachings and methods from without. Yet the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, unlike the Philippine Independent Church, never let its problems divert its attention from its drive for growth.

We saw at the close of the preceeding chapter that the war almost stopped the *Iglesia's* expansion into new

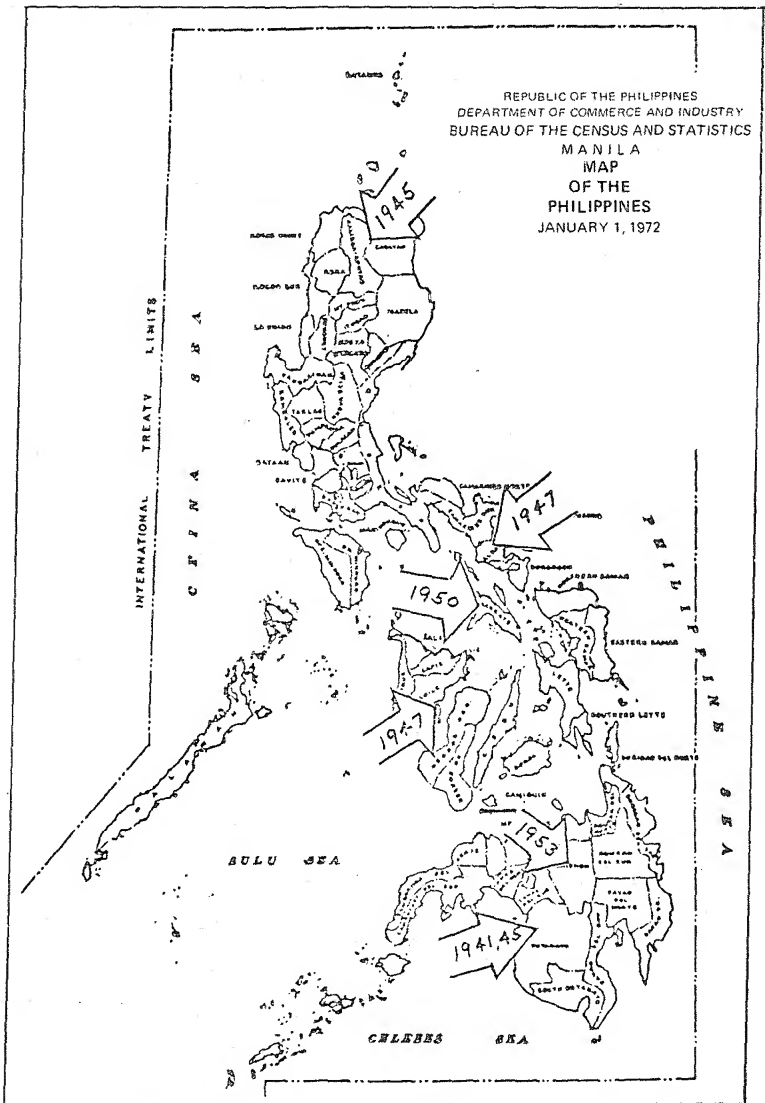


Figure 2:
Map of Philippines Showing Directions of Post-War
Iglesia Growth

areas. Almost, but not quite. For in 1942 the very important Mountain Province in Northern Luzon was entered.

Mountain Province (now divided into several smaller provinces) is mainly peopled by animistic tribes, but it is also the location of Baguio City, the summer capital of the Philippines, as well as many mining communities. To Baguio City came the Mauro Langit family in 1942 to seek medical attention for their child. They settled there, and being *Iglesia* members, they requested that a minister be sent to hold worship services in that mountain city. Cipriano Sandoval, a brilliant thinker and organizer, was sent along with several other workers and began intensively to propagate *Iglesia* doctrines. The congregation they established at that time has since seen remarkable growth, especially after the war when Baguio City experienced something of a boom as a summer resort.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has never engaged in pioneer evangelism among animistic tribal peoples of the Philippines. It has developed its propagation methodology very much as an appeal to members of other existing Christian churches to become "true biblical Christians." Where there are no churches most of its message has little meaning. In the mountain provinces most of its growth has been in Baguio City and in the various mining towns among transplanted lowland *Cristianos* and Christianized tribal people.

This wartime outreach perhaps set the stage for the strong thrust northward immediately after the war. The ten years following liberation would see the *Iglesia ni Cristo* expand nation-wide, but its first drive was north, largely among the Ilocano-speaking people. The first province to be entered after the war was Cagayan. This outreach from Ilocos Norte was directed by Cipriano Sandoval. The worker was Jose Nisperas whose first meetings in

Pata, Claveria (close to the Ilocos Norte border) resulted in twenty-five baptisms. Before the year was out Nisperas was able to begin another congregation in the town proper. Growth continued steady, though not spectacular, in Cagayan province.

In May of that same year (1945) four workers from La Union (where work had begun in 1938) entered the town of Tagulin, Ilocos Sur. Catholic opposition there was exceptionally strong. The priest and nuns went house to house dispensing medicines to gain the people's goodwill, and at the same time strongly forbidding them to attend the *Iglesia* meetings. Nevertheless, the workers were able to gather a congregation and began worship services in February, 1946.

The last province to be entered in Northern Luzon was the small province of Abra in 1950. Here again the *Iglesia* was able to begin a congregation because one of their families who had been members of a well-established congregation in San Fernando, La Union, returned to its home province and requested that a worker be sent to them. Deeply instilled loyalty to their church helped build the bridge across which the *Iglesia* grew.

By 1950 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had entered all of the Ilocano-speaking provinces of Northern Luzon. Apparently, up to the present time it has not yet been able to enter the extreme northernmost province of Batanes (where the Fundamental Baptists have a strong church), and the two mountain provinces of Kalinga-Apayao and Ifugao. Though not the area of their greatest strength, the *Iglesia* has successfully multiplied congregations in the towns and barrios of Northern Luzon.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* became a truly national church in the late 1940's as it vigorously entered every major area

of the Philippines. Congregations were begun and divisions established in Bicol (Southern Luzon), Eastern Visayas, Western Visayas, and the great frontier island of Mindanao. These must have been heady days for the *Iglesia* leaders as they generated this nation-wide expansion. During the pre-War years the *Iglesia* normally entered no more than one new province a year (1938 was a notable exception when it entered four), but in 1947 it entered three; in 1948, four; in 1949, five. And in 1950 the climax was reached with congregations begun in eight new provinces! Then, primarily because it was running out of new provinces the rate decreased abruptly, and after 1954 no new province were entered. But it is important to realize that by that time all of the major provinces had been entered. Most of those which had not been entered were either strongly tribal or Moslem.

We will not detail this post-War expansion but we will illustrate two important related social mechanisms which greatly aided *Iglesia ni Cristo* post-War growth. One was the migration phenomenon, especially from Luzon and Visayas, into Mindanao. The other, related but not identical was the increased general mobility of the population, especially due to increasing industrialization and urbanization. Both of these are part of what Read and Ineson call the "M" (for "movement") factor in church growth. They describe this factor at work in Brazil, but it equally applies to the Philippines.

The dynamic movement of all this change might be termed the "M" factor. This "M" factor is at work in these areas of economic development. It creates a receptivity on the part of the hearer of the gospel proclamation. When the ties of a traditional past are broken by the "M" factor by substantial movement, migration, and mobility, then we can expect a new climate of acceptance to the

Protestant message by large number who are caught up in this "M" factor. Motion by people on this magnitude means change. Old institutions are left behind, and dramatically so, by migrants who are not average people, but courageous pioneers who have paid a price to put themselves in motion. Those caught up in the "M" factor are exposed to these new circumstances and a new way of life develops as they move from the traditional to the modern style of life. Accidents, hardships, and new encounters occur.

There is an exposure to new places, new people, and a new, strange society in formation. The "M" factor—movement—means exposure, and successive exposures lead to unexpected transformations and, for many, spiritual conversion from an old life to a new life in Christ. (Read and Ineson, 1973:165)

America-connected Protestants are not the only ones who benefit from the operation of the "M" factor. Independent churches, such as the *Iglesia ni Cristo* benefit too. The story of how the *Iglesia* entered the great island of Mindanao is an instructive example of how the "M" factor aids church growth. The focus in this instance is a movement of church members as they are caught up in a pattern of migration.

Shortly before the Second World War broke out on July 10, 1941 thirty families from the Paco, Manila *Iglesia ni Cristo* congregation bid good-bye to Felix Manalo to become settlers in Cotabato, Mindanao under the National Land Settlement Administration (NLSA). This "ready-made" congregation was already organized upon arrival in Cotabato with a head deacon, assistant deacon, deaconess, and song leader. Florentino Seneca, an unpaid worker, went along with them to serve as minister. They landed in Dadiangas, Cotabato on August 1, 1941 and a little later

were given their land in Barrio 7, Banga, Cotabato. Here they built a temporary chapel and immediately began to preach in the surrounding barrios. Several new congregations were quickly formed, but very soon war broke out, and most of this work was lost. But the original congregation and one other in Barrio 4, Marbel remained intact.

Immediately after the war Manalo sent Mariano Suarez to Cotabato to revive the pre-War work there. He began by seeking out those who had been previously reached. The first *Iglesia ni Cristo* baptism in Mindanao was held on August 3, 1946 with twenty-one baptized. Two more baptisms were held before the end of the year (see Pasugo July 27, 1964:151).

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* was not the only church which grew through this great government-encouraged migration into Mindanao. Many Protestant churches also experienced rapid church growth among the various homogeneous units of the newly emerging society on that previously underdeveloped island. In 1953, for example, the Methodists began their fruitful work among the Ilocanos who had migrated into Mindanao. Also in the 1950's the Southern Baptists began to follow up Baptist Ilongos who had come from the Western Visayan islands. The Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of the Four Square Gospel, United Church of Christ, and many other smaller denominations all benefited from the operation of the "M" factor during those days in Mindanao.

But there are lessons for other churches in the *Iglesia* efforts. For example, it started earlier than most. It moved south with the early waves of settlers, and it moved with the definite purpose of extending itself in this new area. One advantage of its strongly centralized form of church government may well be the ability to keep track of its members as they move and to follow them up immediately.

Another advantage which the *Iglesia* possessed as it advanced into Mindanao (and other areas) was that it was not bound in any way by comity arrangements with other churches since it recognizes no other church. In contrast the Convention Baptists did not follow their Ilongo members into Mindanao because of their comity agreements with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Comity agreements may well have had their place in missions, but they should take into account the sociological fact that like attracts like, and a given church or denomination can follow up its own members better than anyone else can. We do not have the necessary information, but it would be interesting to know among which homogeneous units of settlers the *Iglesia* grew most. Was it among the Ilocanos? Or Tagalogs? Probably, it was not among the Cebuanos or Ilongos since the *Iglesia* had only recently arrived in the home provinces of these groups and was not yet strong in these areas.

A slightly different operation of the "M" factor can be seen at work in the story of the entrance of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* into the Western Visayan islands, beginning at Iloilo. In this case the entrance was effected, not by immigrants moving into the area, but by employees of a Manila company who came to these islands on large construction jobs. This case study is of more than passing interest since at least two Western Visayan provinces, Iloilo and Negros Occidental, were opened through the efforts of teams of men employed by the same large construction firm. And the most intriguing aspect of this story is that this company was the same Atlantic Gulf and Pacific Company where Felix Manalo found his first converts so many years before. An employee of the same company was also instrumental in establishing the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the heavily Moslem province of Lanao in Mindanao.

Western Visayas is the center of the sugar industry of the Philippines. The skylines of the cities of Negros Occidental, in particular, are dominated by the tall chimneys of the sugar "centrals," the large refineries which process the cane into refined sugar for export around the world. On the jobs handled by the Atlantic Gulf Company in those days was the construction of these huge sugar centrals, so large Atlantic Gulf crews entered these provinces in the late 1940's to build these refineries.

In June, 1947 Atlantic Gulf workers, with an *Iglesia ni Cristo* foreman came to Iloilo. There they began a special mission with the help of Alipio Apolonio whom we met in Cebu but who at this time appears to have been under some type of ministerial discipline, since the report refers to him as having no authority then ("walang karapatan"). Three ministers in good standing were quickly sent over from Cebu to finish the indoctrination and baptize the new converts. On July 13, 1947, after only one month, thirty-five were baptized in Iloilo City.

A similar story was repeated in Negros Occidental, also in 1947. The San Carlos Central Milling Company in San Carlos City, across the Tanon Strait from Cebu Island, was being constructed by an Atlantic Gulf crew composed completely of *Iglesia ni Cristo* members. They began to actively propagate their faith, and before long ministers again had to be supplied from Cebu. A congregation was begun in San Carlos City, and the construction crew built the new local a chapel.

Later the same year this crew transferred to Silay City, on the other side of Negros Island, to work on another sugar central. They were able to start a local in the neighboring town of Sarabia, and the crew built a chapel for this new congregation also. For these laymen making a living was apparently secondary to propagating their

faith. Two provinces opened by construction workers is a feat that could well be emulated by laymen of evangelical churches which make so much of "the place of laymen in the life of the church."

During the post-War period the *Iglesia ni Cristo* grew by a combination of many factors. Church growth is never simple, but usually certain factors are more important than others, and so are determinative. In the case of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, the most important factors seem to have been a strong pre-War base upon which to build: dedicated, aggressive laymen eager to spread their message wherever they moved; an effective deployment of ministers by a strongly centralized leadership; and the existence of receptive peoples in the various provinces of the Philippines in this post-War period, characterized by immense social change. And behind all of this was the continuing charismatic leadership of its founder-head, Felix Manalo, now firmly anchored to a doctrinal base as God's messenger for the Philippines and possessed of a central fund (which I describe later) of hundreds of thousands of pesos which he could use as he liked. That he used much of it for evangelism and church growth is noteworthy. These factors will be more thoroughly investigated in a later chapter.

What were the actual facts of growth during this period, 1945-1963? Do any hard figures exist on which we can base some estimate of their rate of growth during these years? Fortunately, we have census figures covering most of this period. First, the 1948 census gives the total *Iglesia ni Cristo* community as 88,125 or one-half of one percent of the population of 19,234,182. In 1960 the census figure was 270,104 or one percent of the total population of 27,087,685, representing a very healthy 206.5 percent increase in twelve years! This should be compared with the 76.7 percent Protestant growth and 2.9 percent Aglipayan decline

during the same period. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* challenges these figures, saying they are too small; but they seem to be consistent with other information available, including the record of their pre-War growth. Teodoro Santiago, for example, reports that when he left the *Iglesia* in 1952 it had a baptized (communicant) membership of about 75,000. A reasonable estimate then of its 1948 communicant membership (*Iglesia ni Cristo* practices believer's baptism) would be about 60,000 or approximately 70 percent of its census figure. Read and Ineson in Brazil use 60 percent of census figures as a rule of thumb for estimating communicants from census figures of Lutherans in Brazil (1973:27, footnote). The 70 percent figure does not seem unreasonable for such a tightly disciplined church as the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Using this rule would mean that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in 1960 had about 190,000 to 200,000 baptized members. For a diagrammatic presentation of the type of growth we are describing see *Figure 3* (page 88) which clearly shows that most of the growth of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has occurred since the war.

Intense Conflict With Other Churches

No church can grow as the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has in a country which is already nominally Christianized and not conflict with other churches which already exist in that country, even if it is completely irenic in spirit. And given the fact of the very aggressive, even belligerent stance of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, intense conflict with other churches was inevitable. Through its entire history the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has sought to use debate with other churches as a means to bring itself and its message to the attention of the Filipino people. This conflict and debate with others reached its high point (or low, depending upon your view-

point) during the 1950's and early 1960's, and thus coincided with its period of greatest growth.

The Roman Catholic Church was its primary target, and on it attacks were ruthless and were returned in kind. Taking the November, 1955 issue of *Pasugo* as representative of that period, we notice that the issue begins with an editorial attacking the Catholic efforts to teach religion in the public schools in the Philippines (bewailed and condemned by all Protestants), and asking what benefit Catholicism has been to the Philippines when it was obvious that all of the gambling houses, bars, nightclubs, and bawdy houses were all owned by Catholics and patronized by them. The next article is entitled, "Let's examine the Catholic faith in the light of Holy Scripture" (in Tagalog). Other articles in the same issue attacks worship of images ("worshiping demons") and the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. The English section at the rear features an article on "The Devil's Disciples," attacking the Popes.

Ten years later, the November, 1965 *Pasugo* features a lead article by editor Benjamin Santiago entitled, "*Sino ang Bulaang Propeta?*" ("Who is the False Prophet?"). In it Santiago answers the charge of a Catholic priest that Felix Manalo was a false prophet of the type described by Christ in Matthew 7:15 who would come in sheep's clothing but inside were ravening wolves. Who, asks Santiago in reply, are really those in sheep's clothing? Do not Catholic priests wear long robes for the expressed purpose of being dressed as Jesus was dressed? Santiago quotes Catholic authors to prove this point. And was not Jesus called the "Lamb of God?" Thus the long robes were the clothes of sheep (i.e., of Jesus). And since priests wear them, they are dressed in sheep's clothing, and therefore, they clearly are the ravening wolves to which Jesus was referring.

In 1961, I heard Felix Manalo himself gave this same explanation with sarcastic language and bitter voice in a public rally, and I saw Catholics clench their fists in anger as *Iglesia* members cheered him on. No wonder, an armed guard stood next to Manalo as he delivered his tirade. I came away from the meeting with the feeling that a person would either become a fanatical believer or completely antagonistic as a result of listening to such a meeting. No middle ground existed.

Catholics did not take this abuse lying down. In fact, they returned it with interest. Sta. Romana documents part of the *Iglesia*-Catholic debate by reproducing selections from the pro-Catholic weekly publication **Bombshell** and the *Iglesia* answers to these attacks in the **Weekly Answer** (1955:428-437). These two papers began publication in the latter part of 1954, and apparently, did not continue for very long. The **Bombshell** represented yellow journalism at its worst and dealt mainly with charges of rape and murder against Manalo and his followers. As the conflict degenerated into personal attacks more heat than light was generated, but the end result still seemed to benefit the *Iglesia* which was thus thrust on the attention of almost every literate Filipino.

Protestants were not immune to *Iglesia* attacks. The well known evangelical leader radio personality, Max D. Atienza (now residing in the United States), was attacked in a series of five articles (April-August, 1955), answering his booklet **Ano Si Cristo: Dios o Tao?** ("What is Christ: God or Man?"). In the first article (Pasugo, April 1955:9) author Francisco shows his irritation at Atienza for not revealing to what church he belonged and was "defending." Atienza was a Baptist evangelist on the staff of an inter-denominational radio station at the time. To the *Iglesia ni Cristo* the first question must be, "Which is the true

Church?" And to dodge that question is to them a sign of cowardice or an acknowledgment of defeat. They cannot understand that the question itself may be irrelevant.

The well-known ecumenical leader Enrique Sobrepeña was the subject of a scathing English editorial replying to a critical article he had written about the *Iglesia ni Cristo* (Pasugo, October 1955:33,34,40). In the editorial, Cipriano Sandoval asks,

Is Dr. Sobrepeña of the United Church of Manila sent by God as to be authoritative enough in his dissertation on the IGLESIA NI CRISTO? Those on (sic) the know would question the sanity of his conclusions, nay his mind, if he simply spurts conclusions without having shown from the Bible his right of commission from God. We challenge him to point to any specific verse in the Bible which vouchsafes for his right of preaching, and we shall gladly point to him that he is a bungling critic shamefully devoid of the niceties of constructive criticism, in fine, an instrument of the devil.

Sandoval goes on to deride Sobrepeña's honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by referring to it as "Doctor of Devilment," and concludes by issuing the following challenge.

We challenge him to come out of his dilapidating chapel and debate with us in public. It is very easy for us to prove from the Bible that he is not sent by God. He is an instrument of the Devil. (Pasugo, October, 1955:40)

This last thrust takes advantage of the obvious difference in appearance between the carefully kept up *Iglesia ni Cristo* chapels and the generally poor condition of most Protestant chapels.

Significantly, some of the bitterest attacks were made on the Christian Mission or Church of Christ (1901) (America-connected). The occasion for a particularly savage attack in 1956 was the *Iglesia* claim (substantiated by pho-

tographs and a complete list of names) that a Christian Mission church in Pararao, Balatan, Camarines Sur joined the *Iglesia ni Cristo* when its former minister refused to enter into debate with the *Iglesia ni Cristo* minister who had moved into the area. The January, 1956 issue of *Pasugo* claims that two other Christian Mission churches dissolved as the result of losing debates with the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. The subject of the debates was "Alin ang tunay na Iglesiang itinayo ni Cristo: ang Iglesia ni Cristo o ang Mision Cristiana?" ("Which is the true Church built by Christ: the *Iglesia ni Cristo* or the Christian Mission?").

This running debate with the Christian Mission went on for a year with articles appearing in the January, 1956, April, 1956, and January, 1957 issues of *Pasugo* (the latter issue had three separate articles on this matter). The Christian Mission was defended by Diego Romulo writing in their own *Ang Sulo ng Kristiano* ("The Christian's Torch"). The *Iglesia* attack featured such use of sarcasm as a play on words on the Christian Mission's workers' fellowship known as "Ang Samahang Tagapagpalaganap ng Ebanghelio" ("The Society for the Spread of the Gospel") which in *Iglesia* hands became "Ang Samaang Tagapagpalaganap ng ibang Ebanghelio" ("The Evil Propagation of Another Gospel").

We will not give a blow by blow account of this conflict, but we will show that at least one argument used by the *Iglesia* was based on a bit of misinformation which should be corrected. In *Pasugo* (January 1955:25) Bienvenido Santiago attacked the Christian Mission as being followers of Alexander Campbell who, Santiago says, showed himself to be a false prophet by prophesying the coming of Christ in 1866 which never occurred. Actually, Alexander Campbell was opposed to such date setting, but Dis-

ciples of Christ historians, Garrison and DeGroot, tell how such a misunderstanding of Campbell arose.

Undoubtedly Mr. Campbell took quite literally the biblical phrases about a return "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," but he also took seriously the words, "ye know not what hour," . . . It has been said (e.g., by Edgar Lee Masters in his *Vachel Lindsay: A Poet in America*) that Campbell predicted the end of the world in 1866. This is not true. He did write some articles in which he showed that Miller's arithmetic was wrong even if his presuppositions were right (which he did not admit), and that his theory pointed to 1866 rather than 1843. (1948:206)

Alexander Campbell's own words on the subject were,

. . . there are difficulties that will forever restrain a man possessing a well balanced and well informed mind from ever presuming to fix the era of Christ's coming No person . . . will speak with assurance. (quoted in Humbert, 1961:285)

But the very fact that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was able to uncover such matters shows that although the thoroughness of its researches may sometimes be faulted, it was no mean opponent in debate. *Iglesia ni Cristo* debaters, in fact, gained nationwide attention for the church and spearheaded its advance in the various provinces of the country during that period. Debate suited the Philippine culture. The use of religious debate, therefore, struck a responsive chord in the Filipino people and was a principal means of propagating the *Iglesia's* faith during these early post-War years. Even today Filipinos enjoy an impassioned debate, though its effectiveness as a tool for propagation may have diminished somewhat. And continued reliance on cut and thrust debate replete with sarcasm and overstatement would militate against the new more respectable image that the *Iglesia* is building today.

Building of Cathedral-Chapels

Felix Manalo's dream of many years of a central chapel and a personal palace was finally realized in the late 1940's when the grand San Juan complex was built. Situated on White Hills, San Juan, Rizal, the project cost about two million dollars. With sentinel towers, swimming pool, social hall, formal garden, circular staircases, and exquisitely designed interiors, the palace and chapel became one of the outstanding sights of greater Manila, though it is heavily guarded and mostly hidden behind high walls. Sta. Romana reports that the guard was ordered to "shoot to kill" anyone seen moving around the compound without permit after ten o'clock in the evening (1955:345).

The era of house churches and bamboo chapels had come to an end. Sta. Romana talks of two reconstruction programs (1955:346). The first was when the early make-shift chapels were replaced with wooden and semiconcrete buildings. This was implemented before the Second World War. The second, beginning in the late 1940's and continuing to the present time involved constructing beautiful impressive concrete cathedral-chapels similar in size and style to the main chapel.² By 1955 five had been completed in Sta. Ana, Caloocan, Cubao, Sampaloc, and Tayuman; and Solis, Tondo, and Baclaran (all in the greater Manila area) were under construction (Sta. Romana, 1955:346). By 1973, 137 cathedral-chapels have been constructed in Manila and in the major cities and towns of the Philippines (Pasugo, June, 1973:2).

This building was starting in the late 1940's when the country was just beginning to emerge from its wartime

² The Iglesia calls these "chapels" but they are, in fact, cathedrals. I have, therefore, coined a new term "cathedral-chapels" to describe them.

destruction. How was Manalo able to afford such extravagant construction projects? Rumors persist that much of *Iglesia* money used in its various constructions came from politicians paying for *Iglesia* block voting which, it says, it practices for doctrinal reason. This is, of course, denied by *Iglesia* sources and by the politicians. Because of the fawning attention paid to Manalo by the politicians (of pre-martial law Philippines!), it is hard to believe that no gifts have ever been given. A police chief in the Philippines once explained to me that strangers offer bribes, but friends naturally give gifts on special occasions, such as Christmas or birthdays.

But it is really not necessary to assume such gifts to account for *Iglesia* financial prosperity, given the large disciplined membership and centralized financial system of *Iglesia* giving. Assuming that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had about 50,000 active members in the late 1940's, and that each gave two pesos each week to the church, this would give a total of ₱5,200,000 a year. Added to this would be the very large year-end *Pasasalamat* (Thanksgiving) offering, so an annual income of at least ₱7,000,000 a year would be likely. To build a four million peso project on a yearly income of that amount is not at all unreasonable, especially in the light of the fact that the *Iglesia* had then been in existence for over thirty years.

This large-scale construction program coinciding as it did with the period of rapid membership growth, not only boosted the morale of *Iglesia* members to new heights, but forced outsiders to drastically revise their image of the *Iglesia*. No longer could it be written off as an insignificant sect made up of illiterate members. Manalo had "won" again. His chapels were—and still are—among the most beautiful in the Philippines.

Riding the Crest

The picture of the rapidly growing *Iglesia ni Cristo* which we have been describing must be seen in its context. Great church growth presupposes a receptive population. The years immediately following World War II were a time of great openness to the Protestant message. Japan also experienced a great period of receptivity to Christianity after the war, though it was much shorter and for somewhat different reasons. Unusual receptivity is always present when many different churches experience rapid church growth in the same area during the same period. The following table along with *Figure 3* illustrates what was happening in the Philippines after the war.

Table 2
Comparative Growth Statistics Post World War II

	1948	1960
A.B.W.E.	3,000 (estimate)	10,000 (estimate)
C. & M. A.	4,330	14,251
Convention Baptists	10,397	19,018
Foursquare Gospel	434	6,326
<i>Iglesia ni Cristo</i>	60,000	200,000
Methodist	63,952	74,375
S. D. A.	25,494	62,793
U. C. C. P.	64,000	119,347

Many churches grew during this post-War period, as can be seen from the above table and accompanying graph, but the *Iglesia ni Cristo* uniquely benefited from the new receptivity. It grew from one of several medium-sized churches to a commanding lead in size of non-Catholic churches. Other large churches did not grow so well. Even

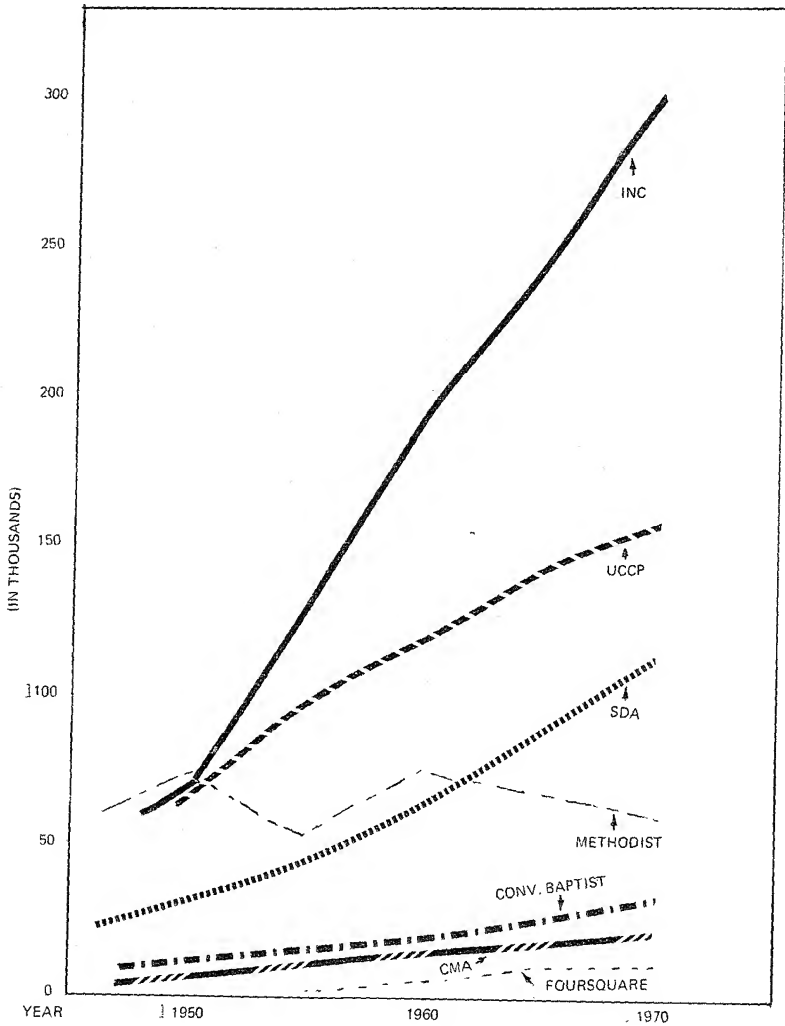


Figure 3:

Comparison Graph Post-War Philippine Church Growth

the healthy U.C.C.P. growth was partially due to merger growth so does not reflect especially great conversion growth, though that also occurred. While other large churches moved ahead in their denominational programs, schools, hospitals, and social work, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* made the most of the wave of receptivity.

How did it do this? It multiplied new congregations in newly entered provinces. Its centralized financial system became increasingly profitable as its mass base increased dramatically. And its great building program raised the morale of its members and focused their attention on growth by the mammoth baptistries built into its new chapels. Even the hard-hitting *Pasugo* became an especially effective instrument in capturing the attention of the newly independent Filipinos in their own national language. All of these instruments were harnessed for capturing the great opportunity for church growth.

Regardless of our personal views of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, an important lesson arises out of these facts. Times of great receptivity occur in the history of peoples but they pass. Single-minded dedication to church growth is the great priority for any church wishing to be a force for God during such periods. Waves of opportunity come and go; and wise church leaders see them and ride the crest, not for reasons of self-aggrandizement, but because these periods of receptivity are God's gift to His Church, and should be seen as such. And, given further research among many peoples, the lesson of history would probably be that those churches, like the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, who are already mobilized for evangelism and for whom "winning the winnable while they are winnable" is their great goal, will benefit most from these recurring periods of receptivity.

Death of Felix Manalo

As his church was growing, Manalo was aging. In August 1955 he travelled again to the United States for medical treatment. When I heard him in 1961 he definitely showed his age in his movements, though his voice was still strong and piercing. The end came on April 12, 1963 when Felix Manalo died at age seventy-seven. It was about one year, four months short of the fiftieth anniversary of the church. He had seen his church triumph, but was he happy in this triumph? Garcia tells that in these last days Manalo's mind would go back to the early days of the church, and to many of the old members who had since left the church, asking that church elders would go visit these lost brethren to restore them to the fold (1964:183). Teodoro Santiago, one of these early members who left the church in 1952, talks of visits by Eraño Manalo, Felix' son, asking him to return, telling him that the *Iglesia* needed an "old man" in the church. I asked Teodoro Santiago what kind of man Felix was. He said that he did not have a pleasant personality. He was aggressive, cold and *mabagsik* (very hard), quite in contrast, Santiago said, to the warm, friendly personality of his son, Eraño. But Santiago believed that Manalo was basically sincere in feeling that he had a special mission to the Filipino people. Whether or not Manalo actually believed that he was the "Angel of the East," is another question. Obviously, Santiago did not, for this was the basic reason why he could not return to the *Iglesia*.

Felix Manalo's influence on the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was determinative and lasting. Another man, his son Eraño, now leads the church, but it still reflects the personality and molding influence of its founder.

Consolidation Period: 1963-1973

Eraño Manalo Leads the Church.

Pasugo was correct in reporting that many outsiders thought (and hoped) that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* would splinter after Felix Manalo's death (July 27, 1964:10). But Felix Manalo had prepared a successor for himself long before he died—then years before, in fact.

At 2:00 p.m., January 28, 1963 a meeting of the division (provincial) ministers, and the executive ministers of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was held in their chapel in San Juan (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1953:1-3). The stated purpose of this meeting was to choose the "general administrator to be prepared for the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, and his two primary assistants." The official minutes (in Tagalog) were filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Manila on April 30, 1963, seventeen days after Felix Manalo's death. At this meeting three names were submitted as nominations for the top post to succeed Felix Manalo on his death: Eraño Manalo, Isaias Samson, and Isaias Reyes. Samson was asked to stand, and those who wished to vote for him were asked to raise their hands. Two voted for him. Eraño was the next to be voted on, and since he received nearly all of the remaining votes, he was declared the general administrator-to-be ("Ang Itatalagang Tagapamahalang Pangkalahatan"). His first assistant ("kanang kamay," "right hand"), on recommendation of Felix Manalo, was to be Teofilo Ramos. And his second assistant ("kaliwang kamay," "left hand"), chosen in a close vote from three nominees, was Cipriano Sandoval. These three executive ministers, Eraño Manalo, Teofilo Ramos, and Cipriano Sandoval, rule the church until today (1974).

Eraño Manalo was born on January 12, 1925, the fifth child and third son of Felix and Honorata Manalo. He

took his primary, intermediate, and high school studies at St. John's Academy in San Juan, Rizal where he was not required to attend the religious instruction classes. He, like so many Filipinos, then took up law, but left his studies before getting his degree to become a minister in the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. He became general treasurer of the church and circulation manager of *Pasugo* magazine. With Ceasar Castro he authored a 64-page booklet attacking the deity of Christ entitled, *Christ: God, Investigated—False*

On January 17, 1955 Eraño Manalo married Cristina ("Tenny") Villanueva in the San Juan Riverside Chapel. Their wedding sponsors were Senator and Mrs. Sergio Osmeña, Jr. Senator Osmeña was a faithful Catholic, immensely wealthy, right-wing, pro-American politician, of a well-known Cebuano political dynasty. The February, 1955 issue of *Pasugo* featured a double page spread of formal wedding pictures celebrating this occasion.

Now a mother of six children (she says her eldest son, "Eddie Boy," is already being trained in his father's work), Cristina became a leading figure in pre-martial law Manila society. In 1972, for example, several long pieces appeared in the society pages of Manila newspapers describing fabulous parties given by her or for her at the new *Iglesia ni Cristo* headquarters "palace." The invitation list reads like a "Who's Who" of Manila high society. Mrs. Manalo was even compared with "the woman in the other palace" (Mrs. Imelda Marcos).

Eraño Manalo's assumption of *Iglesia ni Cristo* leadership upon the death of his father was thus a foregone conclusion. But when the event actually occurred, Eraño (now affectionately called "Ka Erdy") embarked on a whirlwind tour of the islands to gain public exposure through mammoth rallies. The July 27, 1964 issue of

Pasugo, has a special 34-page section devoted exclusively to photographs of Eraño Manalo in these various rallies. One picture shows a portion of an estimated crowd of 25,000 attending a special worship service held in Dagupan City in Central Luzon.

To emphasize the fact that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was not only still united but growing at an unbelievable rate, the March, 1965, and November, 1965 issues of **Pasugo** featured cover photographs of large numbers of baptismal candidates dressed in white robes ready for baptism. The November, 1965 cover shows a group of 774 candidates baptized on October 16, 1965, and explains that on October 2, two hundred twenty-eight had been baptized, and estimated that more than 700 more would be baptized on October 30, making a total of about 1,700 baptisms in the Manila division (33 locals at that time) during that one month — hardly a picture of a disintegrating church!

Tall, handsome, always impeccably dressed, Eraño Manalo has proven to be a forceful and able administrator of his church. Because he has concerned himself so much with political matters, I had thought that possibly the more “churchy” matters, such as doctrine and the training of ministers, were now in the hands of his associates such as Teofilo Ramos and Cipriano Sandoval. But I have been assured by Teodoro Santiago and others that Eraño directs all matters concerning the church life. His wife even remarked that she cannot show anyone around the head-quarter’s grounds without her husband’s permission.

Growth as a Political Force

We have already referred to *Iglesia ni Cristo* activities in the political arena, especially to their practice of block voting for *Iglesia*-approved candidates. This activity increased under Eraño Manalo until the imposition of martial

law and helped shape the *Iglesia's* image as a large, imposing, powerful institution with which political leaders were forced to deal.

In earlier days, when the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was still small, its leaders believed this activity was eminently justified because the young church was fighting for its life against an overwhelmingly powerful Roman Catholic Church which did not hesitate to use political means to further its ends. Teodoro Santiago tells of powerful Roman Catholic politicians harrassing *Iglesia ni Cristo* members and congregations so that its leaders felt that it had to become a strong political force to solve this problem.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has tried to justify its block voting practices by pointing to scriptural teaching concerning the unity of believers (see *Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:254-257). How, they ask, can *Iglesia* members vote for opposing candidates and preserve their unity? Their argument (translated from the original Tagalog) is as follows:

What is one of the commands of God that *Iglesia ni Cristo* (members) should fulfill to the glory of the Father in heaven?

In I Cor. 1:10, the Apostle Paul says:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak only the same thing, and do not have divisions among you, but be united in only one thought and one judgment."

This command of God by the Apostle Paul is fulfilled by the *Iglesia ni Cristo* (members) in their complete unity in voting or electing leaders to govern the country. God forbids *Iglesia* members to have divisions or parties. Therefore, if *Iglesia ni Cristo* members have their own different candidates, this is against the teaching of God that they should be united in one thought and one judgment. If the judgment of the brethren in the *Iglesia ni*

Cristo differs on who should govern the country, they sin against God because transgression of the law is called sin (I John 3:4). Therefore also, those whom the Iglesia ni Cristo members agree to vote for to serve the country are those who will fulfill the laws equally for all citizens without investigating their religion or station in life. If Iglesia ni Cristo members are able to perform their service to God under the administration of the elected officials, this is to the glory of God. Selfish interest is not the basis of voting for the Iglesia ni Cristo. (Iglesia ni Cristo, 1964:256)

According to the last part of the above paragraph, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* does not demand special favors from those elected, only a guarantee of equal treatment under the law. Nevertheless, indications of pressure for preferential treatment do exist. Block voting may seem justified to the *Iglesia* leaders, but it is hard to deny its potential dangers as a political and religious weapon. If the *Iglesia ni Cristo* were to control the majority of Filipino voters, elections would no longer have any meaning and democracy would be dead in the Philippines.

Many political observers considered the 1965 presidential elections as a test case for *Iglesia* political strength. The Japanese political scientist, Hirofumi Ando made a special study of the role of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in this election (1966:357-366). Tension had been rising between Catholic and non-Catholic churches before that election because of insistent Catholic demands to legislate religious instruction. These efforts had been at least temporarily defeated when the "Cuenco Bill" did not pass Congress. Seeking to defend religious liberty, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* backed Ferdinand E. Marcos, a graduate of the secular University of the Philippines, and thus considered more suitable than either Macapagal (the incumbent), or Mang-

lapus, who were both products of Catholic institutions (Ando, 1966:364).

The Catholics retaliated by rumoring that Marcos had promised Eraño Manalo the position of Secretary of Education (this, of course, never materialized). In addition, Filipino Cardinal Rufino Santos sent a letter from Rome urging Catholics to consolidate their votes for the "best Catholic presidential candidate." This was interpreted as a strong endorsement of Macapagal, and as such was repudiated by Archbishop (now Cardinal) Rosales who also sent a statement from Rome. Thus Catholic political moves against the *Iglesia ni Cristo* backfired. Marcos was elected, and the reputation of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as a political power was heightened (Ando, 1966:366).

The 1969 presidential elections faced Eraño Manalo with a very unpleasant choice. His marriage **ninong** (Godfather), Sergio Osmeña, Jr., was running against the increasingly powerful incumbent, Marcos. At first, it appeared that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* would back Osmeña, but in the middle of the campaign, the *Iglesia* abruptly switched. Osmeña who had always been a welcome guest at Manalo's palace now found himself **persona non grata**. Marcos won the election, and the public feeling grew stronger that the *Iglesia* would never back a candidate who was obviously heading for defeat. Kiunisala, writing in the popular **Free Press** magazine, asked, "Was it because Osmeña bragged about his connection, or that the INC saw that Marcos' win was inevitable anyway and did not want to bet on a losing horse?" (1969:7) Marcos won, and *Iglesia* prestige was again enhanced, though Marcos astutely avoided any statement or action which would support the idea that his win was due to *Iglesia* support.

During this 1969 campaign I heard a special announcement given in an *Iglesia ni Cristo* service stating that all

members of age were required to register for voting, and if they encountered any difficulty in registering to be sure to contact their head deacon who would help them register.

This political activity became very important in *Iglesia* life, but was soon to undergo a drastic change.

Present Situation under Martial Law

Every second evening of January, since Eraño Manalo ascended to the leadership of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, has been marked by a gala birthday affair held in his honor, attended mainly by well-known politicians of both major parties. But January 2, 1973 was different. All was quiet in the *Iglesia* palace because politics no longer existed in the Philippines. On September 21, 1972 President Marcos had signed Presidential Proclamation 1081, declaring a state of martial law over all of the Philippines. Politicians found themselves out of office and the regular electoral process no longer existed. The event had proved particularly traumatic for the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, but the latter seems to have quickly adjusted to the situation.

One of President Marcos' first moves under martial law was to order all radio and television stations off the air. Early in the morning of September 21, 1972 Philippine Constabulary troops arrived at the *Iglesia*-controlled Eagle Broadcasting Company with the Presidential Order to close down the station. Pasugo, along with all other non-government publications had to cease publication for several months, but has since resumed publication.

When Pasugo resumed publication, the editorials indicated support of President Marcos' "New Society." The editorial of the August, 1973 Pasugo mentioned that the fifty-ninth anniversary of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, July 27, 1973, coincided with the referendum in which all Filipino

citizens from age fifteen voted whether or not President Marcos should continue in office after the end of 1973 when his elected term would end. Pasugo added significantly, "The *Iglesia ni Cristo* voted in favor."

The accomplishments of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* under Eraño Manalo were summed up in an article by Cipriano Sandoval entitled, "Within a Span of Ten Years" (Pasugo, June 1973:2,9). He lists the following items (I use his wordings) as proof that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has continued to progress "even after the demise of the last Messenger of God on April 12, 1963."

1. Number of divisions (usually comprising one province or an area like greater Manila) increased from 45 in 1963 to 64 in 1973.
2. Number of locals increased from 2,067 to 2,584.
3. Number of preachers from 914 to 1,902.
4. Number of big chapels from 40 to 137.
5. Total value of lands owned by the church from US\$1,100,000 to more than US\$3,700,000. (Sandoval also notes that nothing has been mortgaged and no debt has been incurred in acquiring these lands.)
6. In 1971 the central office building was constructed at a cost of US\$3,000,000.
7. The church opened its work in the United States, beginning in Honolulu, Hawaii on July 27, 1968. It now has 21 locals and nine houses of worship owned by the church in the United States, with the total value of US\$760,000.

The accompanying bar graph shows the *Iglesia ni Cristo* growth from a small church (1922) to a medium-sized denomination (1940) to its present-day position as the largest non-Catholic church in the Philippines. We will study the graph of growth more in detail in chapter eight, but it is clear at this point that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has

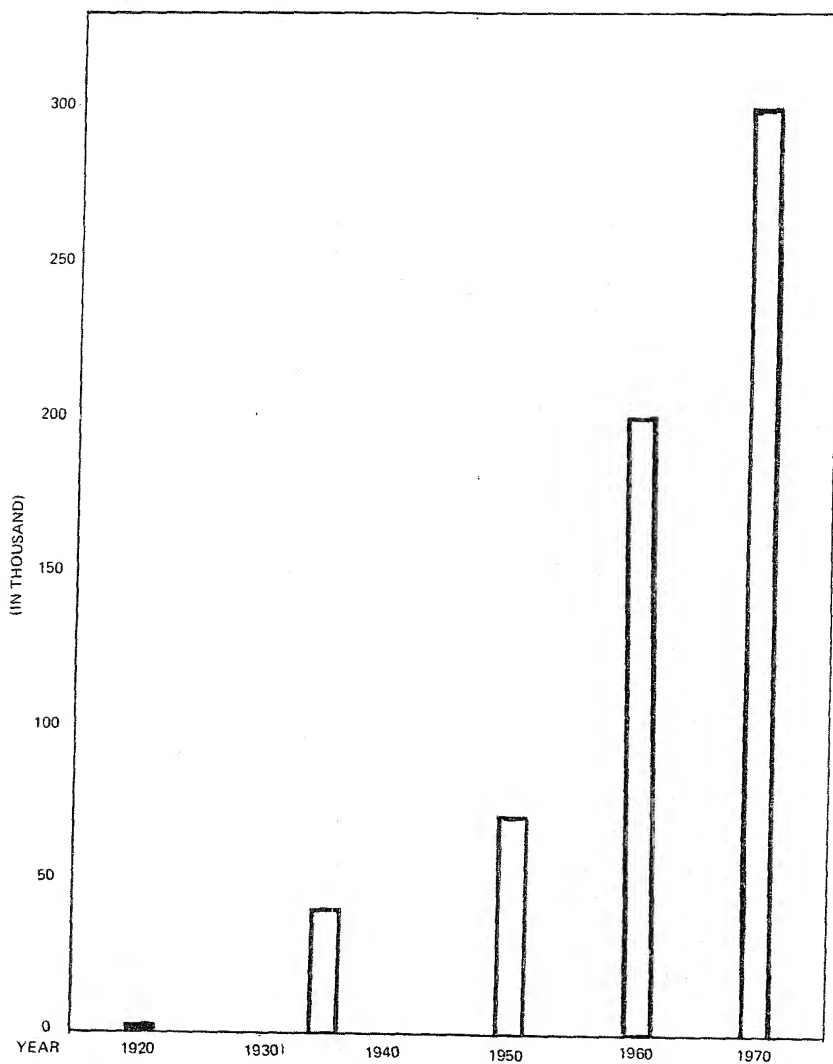


Figure 4: Bar Graph of Iglesia Growth: 1922-1970

continued to grow and increase in power and wealth under Eraño Manalo. The prophets of doom were again disappointed.

Foreign Missions

For Americans to hear church work in the United States referred to as foreign missions may come as a jolt, but it is that for the Philippine-based *Iglesia ni Cristo*. *Iglesia* foreign mission work began on July 27, 1968, the church's 54th anniversary. That evening, Eraño Manalo, along with six other ministers (including Cipriano Sandoval), enplaned for Hawaii. Forty *Iglesia* members met them at the Honolulu airport and escorted them out through the sugar cane fields to Ewa where a five o'clock service (still on July 27th) was held. Brandon V. Rosquites describes the scene:

The congregation arose in prayer, led by Brother Sandoval. From the very first words he spoke till the last, the prayer was highly spiritual. As if to show proofs that the prophecy was at the offing, the Holy Spirit descended upon the worshippers and consoled them with soothing tears. The experience was a rare one even to the witnesses who have been with Brother Eraño all along. "The house shook, the brethren's response was deafening," said one of the witnesses.

The sermon came as a revelation of the Lord's will. Brother Eraño appealed to the brethren that they hold fast to their spiritual duties. The last holy act was about to be done. Brother Eraño, standing before the silent assembly, unfurled a scroll and read from it the official proclamation of the congregation's establishment. Then, the congregation officers were all summoned to the front and were sworn into office by Brother Eraño, who consequently led the last, soul-moving prayer. All brethren signed on the proclamation scroll after-

wards, including the seven witnesses. The pilgrim service was over; a new congregation was born. (Iglesia ni Cristo, 1969:11)

Just two days later, on July 29th, Eraño and his group left Hawaii for San Francisco, leaving Cipriano Sandoval and Pedro Meiban II in Hawaii to establish the work there. In San Francisco Eraño met with *Iglesia* members and then proceeded to New York on August 7th. Returning to San Francisco on August 13th Eraño met again with his members and decided to begin a local there immediately. He telephoned Sandoval in Hawaii on August 14 and ordered him to come immediately to San Francisco to become the minister for the new local. Rosquites relates the events of the next two days:

The next two days were spent in conducting search missions for "lost" brethren. The scattered flock had to be gathered first before starting the conversion of new members. On August 14, Brother Sandoval, Herminio Mariano, and Joven Rosquites inquired at a law office about registration procedures covering religious sects. Registration papers had to be prepared immediately so that all further church activities would be under legal authority.

Later that same day, the last service to be officiated by Brother Eraño was performed at Sister Marina Labson's house at Ormonde Drive in the Mountain View district of the city. Infants were offered to the Lord, among them the newly-born son of a native American who is the wife of one of our brothers. Strange that the Holy Spirit speaks in a universal tongue, for during the offering, this American lady wept openly like one of our brethren, though she could not totally understand the prayer in Pilipino. The San Francisco congregation was proclaimed at Mountain View and its officers were inducted in the same service. (Iglesia ni Cristo, 1969:14)

By 1974 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* had 21 locals overseas, almost one half of them (ten) in California. This rapid growth in California reflects the tremendous increase in Filipino immigration into the United States, and especially into California. Since the Immigration Act of 1965 abolished national quotas, the Philippines has become the second largest supplier of immigrants to the United States, after Mexico. According to the 1970 United States Census figures, 475,000 Filipinos now live in the United States. Of these about 300,000 are in California (Rotea, n.d.).

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is growing today in the United States by "following their own" which they found successful in earlier days in such Philippine areas as Mindanao. This is a valuable strategy and has been used by other churches in various countries, but it can hardly be construed as "cross-cultural" missions. I have attended services in the Los Angeles local which meets in a remodeled club house located in the racially-mixed Lincoln Heights district. The services were very similar in pattern and content to those I had observed in the Philippines. The main difference was in language used. Most of the hymns were sung in Tagalog, but otherwise the services were conducted completely in English. The attendance of over 250 was impressive and was completely Filipino, except for four Caucasians, two of whom were my wife and I, and another was the husband of a Filipina member. It was very much a first generation immigrant church.

Evangelicals need to see the challenge of multiplying churches among immigrant populations in the United States. Filipinos, Koreans, Chinese, and Indians have emigrated in large numbers to the United States. They represent a fertile field for evangelism. Among the immigrants are many vital Christians who can spearhead the evangelism if they are still in living contact with their fellows and given

the needed support. Some denominations, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, already are moving ahead aggressively in efforts to follow-up their own members and evangelizing others. The Seventh Day Adventist Filipino Church in Highland Park, Los Angeles, has over four hundred members. And evangelical organizations, such as Philippine Ministries, Inc., have been formed to engage in evangelistic work among their own people. But much more needs to be done, and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* experience in the United States proves the strategic value of multiplying homogeneous unit churches among these immigrant peoples.

Iglesia ni Cristo foreign missions teach another important lesson. Such mission efforts cost money, and may very well need some "pump priming" from the sending country even in the United States. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* was willing to make a substantial investment of money and personnel to launch its mission effort. Evangelicals should take a lesson from its example in buying an older church building in a racially changed neighborhood, remodeling it, and filling it with a culturally and racially homogeneous church. In 1973 the *Iglesia ni Cristo* purchased an older church building from the Methodists in Queens, New York. They remodeled it, along with an adjoining pastoral house. Cipriano Sandoval led the dedication service on May 10, 1973. The cost of renovation was handled by the New York local, along with members from New Jersey and Philadelphia (Pasugo, June 1973, supplement). An interesting sidelight in this story was the conversion of Howard Royal, a black American contractor in charge of the remodeling and a professing Baptist. He said that he had never been able to accept the Baptist teaching that Christ was God. He reports that he was happy to find a church in which "every one are truly brothers and sisters with one

mind" (Pasugo, June, 1973:11). Though yet unknown to the average American, and probably unlikely to attract a mass following in the United State, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is growing here, and this fact is being effectively used by *Iglesia ni Cristo* propagandists in the Philippines.

In these last two chapters we have carefully traced the story of the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* amazing growth throughout the Philippines and abroad. The story has many lessons for church growth strategists, but the primary lesson may be that the *Iglesia* grew through careful strategy planning, and especially through the dedicated efforts of common members, as well as ministers, who were fully convinced that their church was the only hope for salvation and so were utterly devoted to its extension. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is, apparently, facing the future with great optimism, and there is nothing to indicate that it will not continue its growth both in the Philippines and in the United States.

CHAPTER 5

ITS DOCTRINE AND HERMENEUTICS

The Christian Faith is based upon a body of teaching contained in the Bible. The heart of Christianity, to be sure, is not a set of doctrines, rather it is a personal relationship between man and God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But this relationship cannot be separated from the teachings in the Bible on which it rests. The first Christians "gladly received his word (and) were baptized . . . and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine" (Acts 2:41,42). Doctrine is important, and what a church preaches and teaches ultimately determines its validity as a Christian Church.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* welcomes examination of its teaching. It is unashamedly doctrinal in its approach, and claims to be truer to the Bible than any other church. Our purpose in this chapter is to present a rather condensed exposition of *Iglesia* doctrine, and describe something of its roots and development. The approach will be descriptive, not polemical, so little space will be devoted to refutation, though obvious errors of Scripture interpretation will be noted. Other authors have more or less effectively refuted *Iglesia ni Cristo* teachings which they consider heretical, but they have often failed to present a full view of *Iglesia* teaching which has led many to underestimate its doctrinal undergirding. Our primary question will be, "What does the *Iglesia ni Cristo* teach?" Not, "How can we defeat it in debate?" The primary source for this exposition will be the book, *Isang Pagbubunyag sa Iglesia ni Cristo*, a 263-page exposition of *Iglesia* teaching to which we will refer simply as *Isang Pagbubunyag*. This will be supplemented by some references to *Pasugo* magazine articles.

What the Iglesia ni Cristo Believes

About God

Chapter one of *Isang Paghubunyang* is entitled, "God and the Proof that there is One," and the first question it asks is, "What is the state of God that we should worship and serve according to Holy Scriptures?" The scriptural answer is given from John 4:24, "God is a Spirit" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:1). The question is then asked, "What does it mean that God is a Spirit?" Luke 24:39 is quoted to show that a spirit is immaterial, "without flesh and bones." This is reinforced by Paul's reference to God as invisible (I Timothy 1:17). At this point, a practical inference is made. If God is Spirit and invisible, then He cannot be worshipped by using any type of image. Here the *Iglesia* makes its first attack on Catholic practice.

The *Iglesia* then brings forward its first argument against the Incarnation. Will God the Spirit, it asks, agree to become man? "I am God, and not man" (Hosea 11:9). And the point is further strengthened by pointing out that God will not allow man to become God according to Ezekiel 28:2 (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:2,3). (We should note that these verses do not actually teach that God could not take on human form.) Psalm 90:2 and Genesis 17:1 are then quoted to show that God is eternal and almighty.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* takes its stand against the evolutionary idea that the physical universe could come into existence through the blind operation of chance or "nature." Hebrews 3:4 is quoted to emphasize that as every house has a builder, so everything has a Maker.

It also strongly affirms the unity of God so strongly, in fact, that no room is left for the doctrine of the Trinity. John 17:3, "that they may know thee, the only true God . . .,"

and I Corinthians 8:6, "But to us, there is **one God**, the Father . . . ," are both quoted to undergird their contention that the one God spoken of in Scripture is the Father, not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. The section in *Isang Pagbubunyag* on the unity of God ends with the following statement, "He who believes, recognizes, and teaches that Christ and the Holy Spirit are Gods (**mga Dios**) also like the Father, do not have eternal life and will not be saved" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:6). No verse is quoted to support this contention.

Thus, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* emphatically denies God's trinitarian nature, though its arguments are all against tritheism, not trinitarianism. But it clearly teaches that God is a Spirit, One, Eternal and Almighty, Creator of all things, and worthy to be worshiped by all men, so placing itself squarely within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

About The Bible

The chapter on the Bible in *Isang Pagbubunyag* begins with the simple statement, "The *Iglesia ni Cristo* believes that the words of God are written in the Bible" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:8). It then asks, "What is the difference between the words of God in the Bible and the words of men?" Numbers 23:19 gives the answer, "God is not man that he should lie." "And why does not God lie?" Because, according to Isaiah 46:11, "What God says He brings to pass." "And where is God's power in bringing to pass His word best seen?" "In His revealing what will yet happen in the future," answers the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

The remainder of the chapter on the Bible is then devoted to an attempt to demonstrate that the Bible actually predicted the details of the First World War, including the use of tanks and airplanes. It even seeks to show that the Bible accurately predicted the length of time which

elapsed between the armistice of November 11, 1918 and the beginning of the Second World War which it dated September 1, 1939. This twenty years, six months, and twenty days period was the "about the space of half an hour" of Revelation 8:1, according to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* system of calculation based upon a literal understanding of the statement in II Peter 3:8 that one day equals a thousand years! The June and July, 1969, issues of *Pasugo* feature a two-part lead article on "The Words of God in the Holy Scripture" by Lucio B. Silvestre which is basically an English translation with some expansion of the *Isang Pagbubunyag* chapter we have outlined above. This article also concludes with a calculation of "about the space of half an hour." A careful study of the Biblical teachings concerning inspiration and revelation is lacking in *Iglesia* publications. But Biblical inerrancy is assumed and church traditions and other sources of revelation are emphatically rejected (see Santiago, 1969:29).

In common with Evangelical Christians, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* holds to the infallibility of Scripture; but in sharp contrast to them it strongly denies the perspicuity of Scripture. The common Christian, according to the *Iglesia*, cannot correctly understand Scripture unless it is interpreted for him by authorized ministers. Though bitterly anti-Catholic, the *Iglesia* has here adopted one of Catholicism's foundational attitudes toward Scripture, and for the same reason, to preserve the unity of the church where all must "say the same thing." We will return to this point later in this chapter when we discuss the hermeneutics of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

About Jesus Christ

An interviewer asked an *Iglesia ni Cristo* minister, "What is the difference between the Protestant beliefs and

those of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*?" He answered, "I think the main difference is our belief about Jesus Christ" (Far East Broadcasting Company, 1970:2).

What does the *Iglesia ni Cristo* believe about Jesus Christ that makes its doctrine so distinctive? The answer of the *Iglesia* minister in the above-mentioned interview was, "Yes, we believe in Jesus Christ, but we do not believe that he is the true God. We do believe in only one true God, the God of creation. Jesus Christ is a great Saviour and was commissioned by God to be the Saviour" (Far East Broadcasting Company, 1970:3).

The denial of Christ's essential deity is a cardinal doctrine of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Over the years Pasugo has published numerous articles on this subject and the book, *Isang Pagbubunyag* has three chapters (22-24, pages 188-215) exclusively devoted to attacking this doctrine. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has two favorite topics for public debate. One is, "Is Jesus Christ God or Man?" The other is, "Which is the true Church founded by Jesus Christ in Jerusalem?" Teodoro Santiago says it was not always so. When Manalo began preaching the new church in 1913 he never, according to Santiago, discussed the matter of Christ's deity ("hindi pinaksa"). He does not remember Manalo attacking the doctrine of the deity of Christ until about 1932. For awhile, he says, Manalo taught that Jesus could be called God in the same sense that Moses was in the verse, "See I have made thee a god to Pharaoh" (Exodus 7:1), but later even this usage was dropped by the *Iglesia*.

The *Iglesia*, since 1940 at any rate, denies Christ's deity as clearly and strongly as it can. It does not sugar-coat the pill, as other groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses do when they deny the full deity of Christ, but still assign him a subordinate, but god-like role. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* plainly denies the pre-existence of Christ.

When was the purpose of God in the beginning to create Christ fulfilled? When the fullness of time came and Christ was born of a woman. Who was the woman who gave birth to Christ? Mary his mother (Matt. 1:6). Only then did Christ come into existence. (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:205, translated from the original Tagalog.)

Most of the *Iglesia* arguments aim at proving that Jesus Christ was a man, quoting verse after verse which use the word "man" to refer to Christ (e.g., John 8:40, II Timothy 2:5). Evangelicals readily accept the force of these texts, since they too believe that Christ was man, though not only man. But many Christians are offended by the *Iglesia*'s cruder arguments. For example, Isang Pagbubunyag asks, "What did she (Mary) do to the child she bore? She wrapped it with diapers. Do you put diapers on God? NO!" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:191, boldface and captials theirs)

A more serious basis for rejecting the deity of Christ is the evident presence in the New Testament of passages which teach a subordination of the Son to the Father (e.g., I Corinthians 15:27-28) or which seem to distinguish between the Father as God, and the Son as Lord (I Corinthians 8:6). After quoting the latter verse, Isang Pagbubunyag asks, "How many Gods were taught by the Apostles?" "Only one." "Who is the one God which they taught?" "The Father" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:213). True, Christ is here called Lord. But what kind of Lordship does he have? Christ was only made Lord (Acts 2:36), not Lord by nature, the *Iglesia* says.

The classical text used by Christians to defend the doctrine of Christ's deity is John 1:1, 14. Isang Pagbubunyag devotes one chapter to these verses (Chapter 23, pages 199-208). The title of this chapter succinctly states the *Iglesia* argument, "Walang Cristo sa Kalagayan sa Pasi-mula Kundi Salita na Binalak" ("There was no Christ in

existence in the beginning, but only a Word which was Purposed"). The "Word" then refers to God's word or **purpose** that Christ would be created which purpose was fulfilled when Christ was born in Bethlehem. This interpretation of "Word" fits John 1:14 ("And God's Purpose became flesh . . . ") better than the last clause of verse one (" . . . and the Purpose was God?"). The *Iglesia* tries to remove the difficulty by saying that ". . . and the Word was God," means that the Word had the quality of God, not His essence. This argument is hardly convincing, but finds some support in Moffatt's translation (which seems to have an anti-Trinitarian bias), ". . . the Logos was divine."

Is the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* position being modified in any way? A recent article by Eraño Manalo's eldest (but still only about 17 or 18 years old) son in *Pasugo* contains a hint that it may be. Using Moffatt's translation of John 1:1, Eduardo V. Manalo comments:

The Logos which was a god or divine was made flesh in the birth of Jesus who, during His Ministry, declared He was and still is, a MAN, as written in John 8:40. (1973:16)

Unfortunately, Eduardo explains no further what he may mean by the words "the Logos which was a god," but this sounds different than the older *Iglesia* explanation that the "Word" was God's purpose.

Though rigorously and repeatedly denying the deity of Christ, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* strongly objects to the wording that Jesus Christ was "**only** man" (*tao lamang*). He was not only man, they say: He was and is Saviour, Redeemer, Lord, and even son of God (though not in any ontological sense). Unfortunately, this positive presentation of Christ's person and work receives very little attention in *Iglesia* writing. Though Christ is often mentioned

in *Isang Pagbubunyag*, I only found one paragraph completely devoted to the redeeming work of Christ. This is an exposition of Ephesians 1:5,7 which contains a clear statement affirming the sinlessness of Christ (the meaning it gives to the statement in Colossians 1:15 that Christ is the image of the invisible God), and affirms that all things will be reconciled to God through his blood (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:28).

Iglesia affirmations concerning Christ's sinless humanity, Lordship, and the saving efficacy of his blood show that common ground between Evangelical and *Iglesia* doctrine does exist. As their ministers speak with Protestants, they not only stress their differences, but also refer to these similarities. As Evangelicals engage in conversation with *Iglesia* members and leaders, they too would do well to emphasize what they have in common as well as the differences. Evangelicals need to stress to the *Iglesia* that they too believe strongly in the full humanity of Jesus Christ since the Bible teaches it. Then they can witness to His deity which is also clearly taught in Scripture. The *Iglesia* should be commended for its emphasis on the authority of the Bible; but at the same time it needs to be challenged to follow the full scriptural teaching concerning the person of Christ.

About The Church

While certain sections of the Christian Church want to de-emphasize the church ("the organizational church is not relevant to today's needs"), the *Iglesia ni Cristo* makes the church the center of their doctrinal position. All that God has done and will do for man, according to the *Iglesia*, has and will be done through the Church. In saying this, the anti-Catholic *Iglesia ni Cristo* has come full circle and affirms the well known Roman doctrine that salvation is

mediated through the one true Church, and outside the Church is no salvation. But now it is the *Iglesia ni Cristo* that is the true Church.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* believes that Christ's great purpose on earth was to establish his Church through which His people would be saved (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:33ff). It points to his words in Matthew 16:18, ". . . I will build MY CHURCH . . . " Whose Church? "MY CHURCH," the Church of Christ, or the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in Tagalog. Christ said His Church would be built upon a rock, and this rock according to Peter in Acts 4:10,11 is Christ himself. "What did Christ build on himself?" asks the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. He built His Church which according to Colossians 1:18 is His body of which He is the Head. And this body is the "new man" spoken of in Ephesians 2:15.

The tightly reasoned argument then proceeds to point out that according to Ezekiel 18:4, whoever sins must die for his own sins; no one can die for another. Now if Christ who was sinless should die for the sins of others, he would break this law of God. Therefore, to save men in harmony with this law, Christ created a new man, one whose body is the Church and whose head is Christ; so that when Christ died, he died for the sins of those included in his body, a limited atonement, though it does not use this term. This point is emphasized by quoting Acts 20:28, ". . . the Church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood." (*Iglesia* leaders know of the textual problem in this verse, but they say that the reading, "Church of God," could not be right since in their view it would contradict other Scriptures which teach that Christ was simply a man.)

After having shown that Christ's great purpose was to build his Church, His body, for whom he died, Isang

Pagbubunyag asks, "Where today is the Church which Christ founded in Jerusalem in the first century?" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:43ff). But before this can be answered, a prior question must be investigated, "What will happen to the Church that Christ founded according to his prophecy in Matthew 24:11?" Christ here predicts that false prophets will lead many (and the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, building on the Tagalog translation, "*ang marami*," says this means the majority) astray. By whom? By false prophets who will arise. And who are these false prophets? Those who wear sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Who wear sheep's clothing? Catholic priests, says the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. At this point the book launches into a lengthy ten-chapter long attack on the Roman Catholic Church. This attack covers such matters as the name of the Church, worship of images, the mass, rosary, processions, fiestas, purgatory, and praying to the saints.

In chapter 16 the book returns to the main line of argument. Where is the Church which Christ founded today? In the Philippines, the chapter answers. Did not Jesus say in John 10:16 that there were "other sheep" which were not yet in the fold when Christ was alive? Who these "other sheep" are is explained by Peter in Acts 2:39:

For the promise is unto you, and to your children,
and to all that are afar off, even as many as the
Lord our God shall call.

The *Iglesia* sees three groups of people referred to in this verse. "Unto you," refers to the Jews who were listening to Peter. "And to your sons," is rather allegorically interpreted by the *Iglesia* to refer to the Gentile Christians who came into the Church because of the preaching of the Jewish Apostle Paul. And who are those who are "afar

off?" This question can only be answered by turning to a locus classicus of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, Isaiah 43:5,6,

Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, give up; and to the south, keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.

The explanation of these verses which takes about a page is repeated almost word for word five times within forty pages in *Isang Pagbubunyag* (pages 131,144,154,162,170). The point of the explanation is to prove that the Philippines is referred to in Bible prophecy as the place where the Church of Christ will emerge in the last days. The line of reasoning begins with the question, "Which 'far' is the location of Jesus' sheep which had not yet been called when Christ was here on earth?" According to Isaiah it is the Far East. In the Tagalog translation (and in the original Hebrew) the words "far" and "east" are not together in the same verse, but James Moffatt helpfully brought them together in his paraphrase to read, "from the far east will I bring your offspring." *Isang Pagbubunyag* comments:

Is it not clear that you can read the words, "Far East?" Clear!

Why does not the Tagalog Bible have them? That is not our fault, but that of those who translated the Tagalog Bible from English—the Catholics and Protestants.

Which is the country (referred to) in the Far East? In *World History*, by Boak, Slosson and Anderson, page 445 we read: "The Philippines were Spain's share of the first colonizing movement in the Far East." So, Filipinos are Jesus' sheep that were not yet in the fold when Jesus was yet on earth. (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:131, translated from the original Tagalog)

Summarizing, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* believes that Christ created his Church, His body, so that He could die for its sins and redeem it. He founded His Church in Jerusalem, but after the Apostles' death, false prophets who were Catholic priests led it astray. Christ brought it into being again in the Philippines. When, and by whom, is the subject of the next section.

One further point needs to be made regarding the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* doctrine of the Church. It has no doctrine of the local church. To the *Iglesia*, the word "church" always refers to the organization as a whole. The locals are called just that, never local churches. Whenever the word "church" occurs in the plural (as it does in one of the *Iglesia's* most often used proof-texts, Rom. 16:16), it is taken to refer to individual members, thus, "the (members) of the Church of Christ greet you," not, "the (local) churches of Christ greet you." The *Iglesia ni Cristo's* dogmatic certainty of the rightness of its name is strongly reinforced by this misunderstanding of this text. Though the English title of its theme song, "I am a Church of Christ," jars the ear because it joins a singular pronoun with a compound noun, the Tagalog version, "*Ako'y Iglesia Ni Cristo*," sounds all right, since "*Iglesia*" serves here as a predicate adjective. In the Philippines the question, "Are you an '*Iglesia*'?" is immediately understandable. But "Are you a church?" would be meaningless.

About Felix Manalo: The "Sugo" Doctrine

A feature of some independent churches which Protestant denominations that have arisen in the West lack is the development of a doctrine concerning their founder. Barrett tells of a number of prophetic movements in Lower Congo (now Zaire) in which Simon Kimbangu had been revered as "God of the Black Man," though now the pre-

sent Kimbanguist Church explicitly declares Kimbangu's essential humanity and clearly affirms the deity of Christ (1968:56). But Simon Kimbangu still has an important place in the teachings of this church, even though he has been dead many years.

In chapter three we saw that about 1922 Felix Manalo himself developed the "Sugo" ("Messenger") doctrine to undergird his position of leadership in the *Iglesia ni Cristo* with a Scriptural foundation. This teaching is developed at some length in chapters 19 and 20 of *Isang Pagbubunyag*, as well as in numerous *Pasugo* articles.

According to the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, Felix Manalo directly fulfills the prophecy in Revelation 7:2-3 concerning the "angel ascending from the east having the seal of the living God." In using Bible prophecy in this way the *Iglesia* is most vulnerable, but here it chooses to take its strongest stand. How does it reason that Manalo fits this prophecy?

First, it affirms that the word "angel" can mean a human messenger, though it also admits that heavenly spiritual beings are also called angels in the Bible. It points to the use of the word in the first three chapters of Revelation referring to the "angels" of the seven churches which many interpreters (including Catholic ones) take to mean the pastors or bishops of these churches. Then it asks, "What kind of angel is spoken of in Revelation 7:2,3?" This angel must be a man and must refer to Felix Manalo for three reasons. First, because of his work; secondly, because of the place from which he arose; and thirdly, because of the time of his appearance.

The work of the angel in Revelation 7:2,3 is to seal the servants of God. What is this seal and how is it applied? Going to Ephesians 4:30 and 1:13 the *Iglesia* says

that the seal is the Holy Spirit and it is applied to men who believe the preaching of the Gospel by the messenger. Since spiritual angels do not preach the Gospel, only men, this angel must be a man who preaches the Gospel.

Where will this angel appear? The text says, "ascending from the east." Going back to Isaiah 46:11 the *Iglesia* makes the familiar point that this is the Far East, and that the Philippines is (not is in) the Far East. So, the angel of Revelation 7:2,3 must be a man who preaches the Gospel in the Philippines.

When is the time which God ordained for the appearance of His messenger from the Philippines? Revelation 7:1 says, "After this. . ." After what? After the war described in Revelation 6:12-15 when people hid in caves (air raid shelters!). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is certain that the First World War is described in these verses in Revelation 6, so that the four angels (also men) which hold back the winds (war) are the Big Four. Since at the same time that these four men were holding back the war, Felix Manalo was already preaching the Gospel in the Philippines, Manalo must be the fifth angel who was to arise out of the (Far) east. The *Iglesia* sees great significance in the fact that its articles of incorporation were registered on July 27, 1914, the day, it says, the First World War began.

Isang Pagbubunyag goes on to attempt to prove that Manalo was also the messenger (ang Sugo) who was prophesied by Isaiah. To do this, it applies prophecies originally referring to both Israel and Cyrus to Felix Manalo. The phrase, "the ends of the earth" in Isaiah 41:9 is unfortunately ambiguously translated in the Tagalog Bible, and the *Iglesia* interprets this phrase to refer to time, not space. So the time of the calling of the messenger is said

to be the end of the sixth seal (in Revelation 6) and at the beginning of the seventh seal — hence the plural “ends”!

One of the more unusual prophecies which the *Iglesia* applies to Manalo is God's message concerning the heathen King Cyrus in Isaiah 46:11, “Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country.” This verse has the advantage of having both the word “east,” and the word “far;” but it has the problem of calling Manalo a “ravenous bird.” Why is the “Sugo” called a “ravenous bird” (ibong mandaragit)? Because, the explanation continues, when this messenger arose in the Philippines, the people there had other religions, so he had to “snatch” (“dagitin” in Tagalog from the stem of mandaragit) those who were called by God into the *Iglesia ni Cristo* out from the other religions or denominations.

This teaching concerning the “pagka-Sugo,” “messengership” or “commissionship” of Felix Manalo is a central pillar of *Iglesia ni Cristo* doctrinal structure. In an interview at which I was present, Dr. Donald McGavran asked Cipriano Sandoval, presently executive secretary of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, why the *Iglesia* could not join in common efforts with other Protestant churches which also accepted the Bible as their sole rule of faith and practice. Sandoval answered, “The issue, sir, is commissionship.” He was referring to the doctrine we have just described. Only the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, he believes, has a messenger especially commissioned by God.

About the Way of Salvation

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is concerned about salvation, spiritual salvation of the individual, not social liberation. Isang Pagbubunyag devotes no whole chapter to this topic, though it is referred to in several. The clearest exposition of the *Iglesia* doctrine of salvation is found in Cipriano

Sandoval's article, "Man's Greatest Problem" (Pasugo, December, 1964:37-39).

Sandoval begins by showing that according to the Bible, God created man upright, but man became a sinner by transgressing the law of God. Sin has infected all men, and all men face death and God's judgment as a consequence. Man cannot save himself, neither by his own wisdom (I Corinthians 1:19), money (Zephaniah 1:18), or by belonging to some favored group of people (Romans 2:11).

What is the solution to this great problem of man? According to John 3:16, Christ has been offered as the solution and has provided through his death a way of salvation. Up to this point, Sandoval's explanation sounds very evangelical. But Sandoval now warns that a person should not rashly conclude, as he says other denominations do, that if he believes on Christ, he will be certainly saved. No, says Sandoval, Christ knew God's law, that each sinner must die for his own sin (see page 113). Christ, therefore, created the "one new man," the Church, became its Head, and it became his body. As his own body, he could die for it without breaking God's law. He died for His Body and for no one else. To be saved, therefore, a person must be in the Body of Christ. To the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, this means that he must become a member of this particular organization.

Exactly how one enters the Body of Christ to be saved is more fully explained by Teofilo Ramos in another article, "Kinakailangang Pumasok Ang Tao Sa Iglesia Ni Cristo Upang Maligtas" ("A Person Must Enter the Church of Christ To Be Saved"). In question and answer form the article deals with the topic in the following way.

1. Q. What did Jesus command men to do in order to be saved?

A. Enter Him and be saved (John 10:9).

2. Q. Can a person outside of Christ do anything good before God?
 - A. He can do nothing, according to Jesus (John 15:5).
3. Q. How can a person become "in Christ" according to the apostle's teaching?
 - A. By becoming a member of his Body or Church (Romans 12:4-5; Colossians 1:18).
4. Q. How does one become a member of the body of Christ?
 - A. He puts on Christ in Baptism (Galatians 3:21).

(Pasugo, August, 1969:32)

After proving that the Body of Christ is the Church according to Colossians 1:18 (Question 3 above), another question is often introduced into the sequence: "By what name do the Apostles call this Church?" The answer is, "By the name, '*Iglesia ni Cristo*,' according to Romans 16:16 ("The churches of Christ salute you")." Sandoval does not overstate the *Iglesia's* position when he says, "The Bible speaks out prominently (sic) that one's only means of salvation is the Church of Christ (*Iglesia ni Cristo* in Tagalog)" (1964:40). He then quotes a series of five Roman Catholic authorities to prove that outside the Church of Christ is no salvation. In doing this he reinforces the Protestant contention that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has retained the older Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation through the Church. The difference is that the *Iglesia* says that it, not the Roman Church, is the true Church.

About the Christian Life

The last seven chapters of *Isang Pagbubunyag* deal with the practical matters which should concern *Iglesia* members. They discuss topics which often occur in *Iglesia* preaching.

The first topic is the duty of *Iglesia* members to attend the worship services regularly (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964: 216ff). Worship services are vitally important for two reasons. First, the members worship God through hearing His Word so that they can obey it. Secondly, they attend because Christ comes to them in corporate worship through his Holy Spirit which they feel in the services and which causes them to weep together when they pray. The sanction which is invoked against neglecting to attend worship services is the scriptural statement in Hebrews 10:26-27 that if we intentionally sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth there is no longer any offering or forgiveness for the offender. The neglect of worship services is referred to as the "greatest sin possible" (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:220).

The next chapter (chapter 26) deals with the offerings taken up at the regular worship services. First of all, it is made clear that giving to the church is a command of God (Hebrews 13:16), and to neglect it is sin against the law of God. But it does not teach tithing is God's command for the church. Rather it quotes II Corinthians 9:7 to show that members themselves must decide how much they will give, "according as he purposes in his heart." The *Iglesia* declares flatly that its ministers do **not** dictate the amount which each member should give. But they all must give something "every first day of the week."

An interesting sidelight on this point is the statement of Teodoro Santiago's son that one reason why his father separated from Manalo was that the latter decided to take up offerings at the Thursday worship services, as well as at the Sunday services. This Santiago considered unscriptural. Does not Paul clearly say, "on every first day of the week?" He did not mention Thursday. Manalo must have felt that sometimes his extremely literalistic proof-text method did have its problems!

A related subject, that of the year-end thanksgiving offering occupies the next chapter. The scriptural commands to give thanks are used to impress this duty on the members. A short chapter on loving and respecting fellow-*Iglesia* members follows.

Chapter 29 explains why the *Iglesia ni Cristo* forbids its members to eat blood. This is a real issue in the Philippines because a cooked blood dish (*dinuguan*) is a tasty Philippine delicacy served with rice cakes. The *Iglesia* points out that God himself repeatedly forbade the eating of blood in the Old Testament, and the Apostles repeated the prohibition in the New Testament, in Acts 15:19-20. The peculiar twist that the *Iglesia* puts on this matter is that it says that the eating of blood is the sin against the Holy Spirit which cannot be forgiven. The apostles said, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." Since it was a command of the Holy Spirit, doing it is sinning against the Holy Spirit (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964:252).

The duty of *Iglesia ni Cristo* members to vote in every election, and specifically to vote for *Iglesia*-approved candidates, is explained in the next chapter. We have already dealt with this topic at some length in the previous chapter, so we will deal with it no further here.

The concluding chapter (chapter 31) reminds *Iglesia* members that they must expect much persecution and should realize that they will be hated by men. This is a recurring theme in *Iglesia ni Cristo* sermons and hymnology, and it is significant that its book of doctrine should end on this note. The *Iglesia*, though quite indigenous in many ways, feels no obligation to conform to the world around it. Indeed, it frequently attacks the world, and this aggressiveness invites attack in return. The *Iglesia* often attacks its enemies and when its enemies retaliate, it refers to this as persecution.

About Last Things

The different systems of interpretation of Bible prophecy fall into several broad categories. These are usually termed the preterist, historical and futurist schools of prophetic interpretation. The preterist school sees the authors of Bible prophecy describing conditions of their own in highly symbolical language. The historical school, in contrast, understands the Bible writers to be describing the whole span of church history until the consummation. The futurists (including most pre-millennialists) believe that Bible prophecy deals mainly with still future events surrounding Christ's return. After carefully surveying *Iglesia* literature, I believe that it follows a rather consistent historical approach to Bible prophecy.

The *Iglesia* believes that the Bible teaches that God's covenant promises to Abraham and Israel were fulfilled in the coming of Christ, the "seed" (Galatians 3:16). God has now made a covenant with Christ, the Redeemer, which extends to his "seed" and to his "seed's seed" (Isaiah 59:20,21). The first "seed" refers to the members of the early Church made up of Jews and Gentiles who remained faithful until death and martyrdom. Then followed the reign of the false prophets (Roman Catholic priests) after the disappearance of the first true Church of Christ. The second "seed" (the "seed's seed"), then refers to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* from the Philippines "to as far it can go to the western part of the world" (Silvestre, 1969:7). This makes clear why the *Iglesia ni Cristo* can see itself as the fulfillment of so many prophecies. It believes that with its appearance almost all prophecies have now been or are now being fulfilled. What is yet unfulfilled is the final consummation of all things.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* outline of things yet to come is quite simple. On the basis of numerous scriptures, the

Iglesia preaches the second coming of Christ. It teaches that when the last trumpet blows (I Thessalonians 4:16), Christ will descend from heaven. When Christ returns "on that very day," the *Iglesia* believes that the heavens will disappear, and the earth will be consumed by fire (II Peter 3:10). Then the dead, both good and evil, will be raised from the dead as taught in John 5:28-29. This will be the great Judgment Day, and those who will be condemned will be cast in the lake of fire, there to be tormented forever. But those who are in the Church of Christ and have remained faithful will enter the eternal kingdom (see *Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1964: 108-111; and Ramos, 1969:5-7).

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* teaches no future millennial rule of Christ on earth. It does not undertake any detailed exegetical interpretation of the book of Revelation as a whole. It does not approach the Bible in that way, but rather builds this doctrine as its others, on the basis of selected proof-texts.

The purpose of the chapter in *Isang Pagbubunyag* which deals with the future (chapter 13, pages 106-111) is not to detail a sequence of future events, but to discuss the question, "Where are the dead?" as a means to attack Catholic doctrines concerning purgatory, praying for the dead, and praying to the saints. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* believes in what is commonly referred to as "soul-sleep," and defends this belief by quoting various scripture references to dead people as "sleeping." Using some Old Testament references (and not referring to Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus), it insists that when a person dies, his soul also dies and has no consciousness whatsoever. The *Iglesia* does teach that the spirit which, it says, is separable from the soul returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7), but it draws no conclusion from this as to whether the spirit has any consciousness or even if it retains any separate existence.

How It Interprets the Bible

Is the Bible Its Only Rule of Faith and Practice?

In our interview with Cipriano Sandoval, Dr. McGavran asked him, "Do you agree with the statement, 'Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent'?" Sandoval answered, "Yes, that is our position." So, at least by this profession the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, like its namesake in the United States, the Church of Christ, aligns itself with the Restorationist Movement. It accepts fully and very strictly the Bible as its only rule of faith and practice.

But this is not quite the complete picture. When I asked Sandoval, "Do you encourage your members to own and read the Bible for themselves?" He hedged and answered, "They have the *Pasugo*!" The *Iglesia ni Cristo* ministers strongly warn their members that they have no right to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Only a minister authorized by the "*Sugo*" (Felix Manalo) may do this. Only officially approved teaching may be propagated. No minister can write his own sermons or publish his own articles without prior approval of its content by church authorities.

What then is the final authority for the *Iglesia ni Cristo*? Scriptures only (*Sola Scriptura*)? Yes, but with an important qualification. It is *Scripture* as **officially interpreted by the church**, a position not far removed from the Catholic teaching concerning its *magisterium*. It is this position which makes discussion about the Bible with *Iglesia* ministers and members often so fruitless. If one suggests an interpretation different from theirs, they simply say that you have no authority to interpret the Scriptures since you are not a "*Sugo*" foretold by Bible prophecy as they say Manalo was.

Its Proof-text Approach

I once asked an *Iglesia ni Cristo* minister, "Would you please explain to me Paul's line of reasoning, and his basic teaching in the first eight chapters of the book of Romans?" He simply answered, "It's about God."

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* unashamedly uses a proof-text method of handling Scripture. It knows which doctrines it especially needs to defend and seeks verses and parts of verses to defend them, often completely disregarding the context. It defends this practice because it says that this is the system of hermeneutics that the Bible itself teaches. The *Iglesia* quotes Isaiah 28:10, "... here a little, there a little," to defend its proof-text method. Thus the *Iglesia ni Cristo* uses a text out of context to defend its practice of using texts out of context. It does not go on to read that Isaiah said that God would teach the drunken priests "line upon line. . . here a little, there a little; that they may go, and fall backwards, and be broken and snared and taken" (Isaiah 28:13).

The proof-text method does have the advantage of overwhelming opponents by the sheer volume of texts cited. In one sermon, I heard 21 different texts referred to, and in another, 26.

Its Tendentia Approach

Like the apocryphal Baptist preacher whose third point in every sermon was, "Water Baptism," the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is able to end up with Romans 16:16 ("The churches of Christ salute you") no matter where it begins. The doctrine that the *Iglesia* is the only true Church is the terminal at which all of its lines of reasoning end.

It has developed its question and scripture answer approach (see page 121 for a very short example) into

an art. Although the book *Isang Pagbubunyag* is printed in standard paragraph form, it just as easily could have been printed in question and answer form. Chapter one, for example, is a series of at least forty-two questions and refers to 23 different texts to answer these questions. It is quite tendentious in that though the stated subject is "God and the proof that there is one," the chapter's real purpose is to stress the unitarian nature of God and to destroy Roman Catholic image worship.

This tendentious approach makes *Iglesia* messages and articles quite repetitive. The same subjects are discussed again and again, and the same questions are answered year after year. We have already mentioned that its explanation of Isaiah 43:5,6 is repeated five times within one volume (*Isang Pagbubunyag*, pages 131, 144, 154, 162, and 172).

Misunderstandings Due to Ambiguous Translations in the Tagalog Bible.

The Tagalog translation of the Bible had been in circulation less than ten years before Felix Manalo founded the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. David Barrett, in his study on independent churches in Africa, lists as one of the four key factors in their rise the "widespread circulation of vernacular scriptures" (1968:192). The Bible in the language of the people plays an important role in the life of most independent churches because, at least in part, it enables these churches to chart a course of their own without having to look to a foreign-based mission for direction and guidance. Barrett does not mention, however, some of the pitfalls of how, for example, a poor translation can abet heretical developments within these independent churches. The case of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* may prove particularly instructive on this point, so we will study several examples of erroneous

interpretations of Scripture by the *Iglesia ni Cristo* which are based upon poor or ambiguous Tagalog translations.

In discussing these instances we are **not** criticizing the *Iglesia ni Cristo* for using the Tagalog Bible as the basis for its preaching. In English speaking countries, such as the United States, preachers use English translations of the Bible in the pulpit. When preaching in Tagalog, Filipino preachers should use the Tagalog Bible. But we hope that this exercise will encourage *Iglesia* leaders to study the Bible in its original languages so that they can base their doctrine on more careful exegesis of the text. And we trust that translators working on the new Tagalog translation of the Bible will be as accurate and unambiguous as possible in their renderings because inaccurate translations can lead to erroneous doctrines.

1. "You whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off." Isaiah 41:9 (RSV)

The phrase under discussion is, "from the ends of the earth." In the original Hebrew this reads, מִקְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ (*miqquetsoth haaretz*) and is translated in the Tagalog Bible as "sa mga wakas ng lupa." In Tagalog the word "wakas," is used to mean "end" in the sense of "end of time," in distinction to "dulo" which is "end" in terms of space. So the surprising interpretation which the *Iglesia* gives this verse, saying that it refers to the calling of Manalo and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* at the end of the period of the sixth seal in Revelation 6, is at least consistent with the meaning of the word "wakas." But the Hebrew is clear. When the word קֵצַה (*qatsah*) is used with הָאָרֶץ (*haaretz*, "the earth"), it means end of space, not time. The phrase would have been better translated into Tagalog as, "mula sa mga dulo ng daigdig" (the word "daigdig," meaning "earth," is

better than "lupa," meaning "land"). If it had been so translated, the *Iglesia* would not have been able to interpret it the way it did.

2. "I am the door, if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."
John 10:9 (RSV)

Here the disputed phrase is "if anyone enters by me," δι' ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ (di' emou ean tis eiselthē), . . . in Greek. The Tagalog translation is "kung ang sinuman ay pumasok sa akin." This translation is ambiguous because the Tagalog preposition (or particle) "sa," can be translated in many ways depending on the context: "in," "out," "by," or "to." In this case the translators meant to say "by me" (the meaning of δι' ἐμοῦ — di' emou), but the Tagalog used can more easily mean "into me" because of the verb "pumasok" ("enter"). The new Tagalog translation is "sa pamamagitan ko," "by means of me," which makes the *Iglesia* use of this verse impossible (cf. page 121).

3. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." Rom. 16:16

"All the churches of Christ. . ." In the original Greek, αἱ ἐκκλησίαι πᾶσαι τοῦ Χριστοῦ (ai ekklesiai pasai tou Christou) and in Tagalog "lahat ng mga Iglesia ni Cristo." For a Tagalog to refer to members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as "mga Iglesia ni Cristo" is as proper as to refer to Catholics as "mga Katoliko." To make this phrase unambiguously refer to local congregations which is what the Greek means, and not to individual members, the translation "mga kapi-sanan ni Cristo," ("assemblies of Christ") could be used.

4. "To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." John 10:3 (RSV)

Here the problem lies in the clause, "... and he calls his own sheep by name. . ." In Greek, καὶ τὰ ἴδια πρόβατα φωνεῖ

κατ' ὄνομα (*kai ta idia probata phōnei kat' onoma*) . . . In Tagalog this was translated, "... at tinatawag ang kaniyang sariling mga tupa sa pangalan. . ." The *Iglesia ni Cristo* says this verse means that the sheep are called by the name, "Iglesia ni Cristo." The problem is again the ambiguous word, "sa." The Greek, κατ' ὄνομα (*kat' onoma*), means "by their respective names," so a more exact translation would be ". . . sa kanikanilang pangalan," "by their own names."

5. "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, whom is over all, God blessed for ever, Amen." Rom. 9:5 (KJV)

In Greek the disputed phrase is "... θεὸς εὐλογητὸς ..." (*theos eulogētos*) which is translated into Tagalog as "... Dios na maluwalhati. . ." The *Iglesia ni Cristo* treatment of this verse is an example of a misunderstanding of the King James Version English translation, and therefore, changing the correct Tagalog translation to agree with their doctrine that Christ is man, not God. The *Iglesia* understands the English word "blessed" in this verse as a past tense active verb, not as an adjective (which εὐλογητὸς — *eulogētos* is). Thus the *Iglesia* says the verse should read, "... Christ blessed by God ..." or in Tagalog, "... si Cristo. . . ay pinagpala ng Dios." To translate the verse in this way reverses its meaning. Instead of saying that Christ is the blessed God, it says that God blessed Christ, an understandable misunderstanding of the King James translation, but clearly an erroneous translation of the original Greek.

These examples should suffice to underscore the need for accurate, clear translations of the Hebrew and Greek originals. The last example shows, however, that even with clear translations a church may not be forced to change its doctrine but may still find ways to rationalize its beliefs.

Doctrinal Antecedents

The facts concerning Felix Manalo's personal spiritual pilgrimage through various denominations recounted in chapter two should alert us to the possibility of finding some doctrinal antecedents of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the teachings of the churches with whom he had been previously associated. Most clearly can these be found in the doctrines of the Disciples of Christ and the Seventh Day Adventist. A look at these antecedents will help us understand better the doctrinal development of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

Disciples of Christ Antecedents

Of all the churches with which Manalo had been associated prior to his founding the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in 1913 the Disciples of Christ, undoubtedly, influenced him most deeply. From it he took as a foundational principle, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where it is silent, we are silent." The uncompromisingly biblical stand of the conservative wing of the Restorationist movement is reflected in Manalo's use of the Bible in defending his doctrines.

Manalo shows his debt to the Disciples in his rejection of infant baptism and practice of immersion. His connecting baptism with salvation puts him in stronger affinity with the Disciples than with the Baptists on the doctrine of Baptism, though Disciples have always rejected the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

Manalo's vigorous insistence on the visible unity of the Church and his abhorrence of man-invented church practices surely trace back to the founding principles of the Restoration Movement. These founding principles found their clearest expression in "The Declaration and

Address" by Thomas Campbell in 1809. As a young Disciples minister in the first decade of the twentieth century, Felix Manalo must have been thoroughly familiar with the thirteen propositions which formed the core of Campbell's "Address." Frederick D. Kershner (brother of Manalo's friend, Bruce Kershner) summarized these propositions. We will quote three of them which are most pertinent to our subject.

1. That the church of Christ is "essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."
4. That the Old and New Testaments alone contain the authoritative constitution of the Church of Christ.
10. That divisions among Christians are anti-Christian, anti-scriptural, unnatural, and to be Abhorred.

(quoted in Murch, 1957:47)

We have seen how Manalo sought to safeguard the unity of the church through requiring all members to subscribe completely to its teaching and allowing no differences of opinion. This practice, however, led Manalo to depart drastically from one of Campbell's most important propositions, number six:

6. That inferences and deductions from the Scriptures, however valuable, can not be made binding upon the consciences of Christians. (quoted in Murch, 1957:47)

Manalo's rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity may be, at least, partly traceable to Restorationist's aversion to creeds and to using terminologies (e.g., "Trinity") that were not found in the Bible itself. Alexander Campbell was a strong believer in the deity of Christ, but another early leading figure was not. Barton W. Stone had grave doubts concerning the matter. Garrison and De Groot describe Stone's position.

In some passages . . . Stone approves a view which is virtually that of a "modal Trinity" — the three Persons being no more than three ways in which a single and undivided God works . . . But his mind did not rest in this view. It might explain the Holy Spirit, but not Christ. He maintained to the end that the Holy Spirit means "the power or energy of God, and never a third person in deity" (*Christian Messenger*, vol. III, p. 58). But he was equally sure that Christ had a separate personality, not only during his incarnation but before and after it, and that therefore Christ is not God if God is one. Hence Christ is to be honored, but not worshiped. (1948:119ff)

Did Manalo learn his debating style from the Disciples? Garrison and De Groot comment on the Restorationists' use of debate.

Under the conditions then prevailing, oral debate was an effective method of bringing the issues before a community. Hundreds of such debates were held, and scores published. (1948:541)

Manalo's insistence of the Scriptural name "Church of Christ" was not original with him. One branch of the Restorationist Movement had made this point before him, and in fact, had used the same Scripture, Romans 16:16. They had, however, stressed that "churches" in this verse referred to autonomous local churches, not individual members. Manalo's teaching drastically departed from this.

Very likely then, Manalo's message when he first began his preaching (and before the development of the "messenger" doctrine) was probably quite congenial to his first Disciples of Christ listeners. Undoubtedly, this is why so many of his first members did, in fact, come from this movement.

In this light an evaluation of Manalo by his missionary friend, Bruce L. Kershner, is significant. This was sent

to me by Kershner's friend, Dean Walker, who says the quote is "almost exact, being made during a lecture to an informal conference at Butler University." Kershner expressed this judgment regarding the quality of Manalo:

A good leader, who knew his people. He was convinced that the people were not sufficiently stable to assume spiritual responsibility for themselves. Manalo dreamed of the freedom he saw in the New Testament; but despaired of entrusting his people with it. (Walker, 1973)

Seventh Day Adventist Antecedents

Felix Manalo strongly rejected many aspects of Seventh Day Adventist teaching when he left that church, especially its legalism and Sabbath-keeping. Whereas, Seventh Day Adventists abstain completely from alcohol and tobacco, many *Iglesia ni Cristo* ministers are heavy smokers because, they say, this is something about which the Bible is silent. However, several important elements in the *Iglesia* doctrinal structure and system of Biblical interpretation do trace back to Seventh Day Adventism.

First of all, Manalo's general approach to Bible prophecy is very similar to that of the Adventists'. Echoes of Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy* can be heard in Manalo's description of the Great Apostasy when the early Church succumbed to the false prophets and became the apostate Roman Catholic Church, the harlot of Revelation 17 (cf. White, 1967:47ff). The historical method of prophetic interpretation was taken over by Manalo from the Seventh Day Adventists. He then applied it to other prophecies to cover the time of the First World War and the rise of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the Philippines.

We have seen that Manalo interpreted the "four winds" of Revelation 7:1 as symbolic of world war. An Adventist

writer, Loughborough, predicted in 1905 that a European-based Great War was coming and referred to this very text.

While there has been strife here, and an outbreak there, the general "whirlwind" is held back: the "four winds" are not permitted to blow at once, "until the servants of God are sealed". (1905:279)

This quotation seems to indicate that at the time that Manalo was associated with the Seventh Day Adventists, they were expecting a great conflagration to break out in Europe, and they apparently saw it as the coming final war. When it did not turn out to be that, some adjustment in interpretation had to be made. Reflecting on the Armistice, Manalo interpreted Revelation 7:1,2 to mean that the winds of war were being held back by the Big Four, and that he, himself, was carrying out the work of sealing (cf. page 118). These ideas seem to have their roots in Adventist thought.

Iglesia ni Cristo teaching on "soul-sleep" and that only the spirit (life-principle) returns to God is recognized Adventist doctrine. But the *Iglesia* doctrine of the eternal torment of the wicked after judgment stands in sharp contrast with the Adventist doctrine of conditional immortality in which they teach that the wicked will be destroyed after they are condemned and have no further existence (cf. Nichol, 1952:369ff).

Probably the most significant connection between *Iglesia ni Cristo* doctrine and Seventh Day Adventist teaching is in the "messenger" doctrine. This will probably come as a surprise to most Adventist and *Iglesia* members alike, though I was put on this track by an *Iglesia* member. The doctrine of the "three angels" is foundational in Adventist beliefs. According to Nichol, the message of

the First Angel (Revelation 14:6,7) is of judgment, the Second Angel's message (Revelation 14:8) concerns apostasy, "Babylon is fallen!" And the Third Angel's message (Revelations 14:9-11) is, according to Adventist interpretation, the warning against Sunday observance and a call to keep the Sabbath Day (1952:668-711). The message of the Third Angel is associated by Adventists with Ellen G. White's ministry. Loughborough goes so far as to say that in this prophecy an angel is a symbol of human messengers (1905:126). Ellen G. White herself clearly says,

I have no claims to make, only that I am instructed that I am the Lord's messenger. . . . Early in my youth I was asked several times, are you a prophet? I have always responded, "I am the Lord's messenger." (White, 1958:31-32)

Though Ellen G. White never called herself an angel, she did clearly refer to herself as God's messenger, and she connected her ministry with the Third Angel's message. Manalo's claim to be the "angel arising out of the east" does not seem fantastic when seen against this background.

Is the *Iglesia ni Cristo* Doctrinally Reformable?

Many churches admit their fallibility and so admit the possibility of, and even the need of constant reformation. The *Iglesia ni Cristo*, however, claims to be the only true Church. What is not clear is if it claims infallibility in its teachings. Clearly it forces all its members to "say the same things." Any reformation would seem to first presuppose an admission of error. But whether this admission would need to be explicit (and so appear to involve a loss of face) is not so certain.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has changed through the years, both in the content of its teachings and in the ways in which they are defended. True, most of its changes in

doctrine have been additions and have not involved reversing previous positions, yet the possibility of change is present.

Change of attitude is also important. Recent issues of *Pasugo* present quite a different image of the *Iglesia* than those of ten years ago. The writing is not nearly so abrasive, and the sharp personal attacks, dripping with sarcasm which filled the issues of fifteen years ago are completely absent. Eraño Manalo even had a good word recently for Catholic theologians. "Brother Manalo made clear that the statements by Catholic theologians are not without Biblical bases" (*Pasugo*, August, 1973, Supplement, page G). (The statements referred to concerned salvation in the Church of Christ.)

The *Iglesia's* tight authoritarian structure militates against reform beginning with the ordinary members, yet even in a dictatorial society a leader must be sensitive to what his followers are thinking. However, any significant change which would be felt throughout the entire organization must be implemented at the top levels. *Iglesia* leaders carry a heavy responsibility as they lead their hundreds of thousands of members. As leaders they must feel this responsibility deeply and so may not be closed to sincere suggestions which only aims to make their church more true to the Bible to which they profess allegiance.

The first step toward a more biblical faith would be for the leaders to begin an inductive study of the biblical text, and especially to study Bible books as wholes. Then they would be in a better position to reexamine all of the biblical bases for their doctrines, as well as build in needed doctrines which they are at present lacking. Such a study would mean that some of the leaders should become well-trained in the original languages. They admit that at present they are not. But responsible scholarly study of the

whole Bible in the original languages is the only way that they can overcome their need for depending on various translations of the Bible which may or may not be faithful to the original text.

Another helpful step might be *Iglesia ni Cristo* leaders beginning conversations with leaders of other independent churches in other countries, such as the "Brasil para Cristo" Church in Brazil under the leadership of Manuel de Melo or even the Kimbanguist Church in Zaire. The leaders of these churches would find much in common, and such conversations might prove mutually helpful.

Churches which share similar backgrounds with the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, particularly the Tagalog congregations of the Disciples of Christ, also may be able to establish some kind of communication with *Iglesia* leaders. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* will listen to others, at least, for purposes of debate. And if *Iglesia* leaders are sincere and love the truth, they may well respond to such overtures. At least positive efforts on this top level should be attempted. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* must be dealt with as the large, powerful church that it is. Talking down to it will not help, but patient, persistent conversations may. Its great walls of defense must have some cracks through which light may pass.

CHAPTER 6

ITS ORGANIZATION, STRUCTURE, AND MINISTRY

Its Organizational Structure

Charismatic Authority and Its Routinization

Turning now to the description of the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* organization and structure, we may be tempted simply to note that as an independent church and not tied to any previously existing religious structure, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was free to innovate and create an organizational structure which best would serve its ends. But to say this would be grossly to oversimplify what actually happened, as well as seriously to underestimate the determinative role of important sociological factors.

Before proceeding then to describe the *Iglesia's* present organizational structure, we will first lay a theoretical foundation for our study by discussing certain pertinent concepts from the sociology of organization. Max Weber's definitive **The Theory of Social and Economic Organization** will provide the general theoretical framework for this discussion. His analysis of charismatic authority, in particular, will provide the theoretical model for our analysis of the development and functioning of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* organization.

Basic terms need to be defined carefully. We speak of Manalo's **power**, his **authority**, and the **discipline** of *Iglesia* members. These key organizational concepts have been precisely defined by Weber:

1. 'Power' is the probability that an actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry

- out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.
2. Authority, 'Imperative control' is the probability that a command with a given content will be obeyed by a given group of persons.
 3. 'Discipline' is the probability that by virtue of habituation a command will receive prompt and automatic obedience in stereotyped forms on the part of a given group of persons. (1947:152ff)

Organizations may be categorized into three different types on the basis of how they legitimate authority. Authority, says Weber, may be legitimated either on the basis of law ("rational-legal" authority) or tradition ("traditional" authority) or charisma ("charismatic" authority) (1947: 328). These are "ideal" types, meaning that they are not usually found in "pure" form in actual historical cases. Nevertheless most, if not all, organizations can be analyzed in terms of these three types, especially as Weber further elucidated them.

In this study we are particularly interested in Weber's "charismatic authority-type" organizational model. Its usefulness will become apparent as our analysis proceeds. Our thesis is that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* under Felix Manalo began as almost a pure charismatic authority type, and as time went on the charisma was routinized (to use a Weberian term) in a classical manner.

Was Felix Manalo a charismatic leader according to Weber's use of the term? Did he exercise charismatic authority over his followers? Weber defines "charisma" as follows:

The term "charisma" will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or

at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as leader. (1947:358ff)

Manalo certainly would qualify according to this definition as a charismatic leader, particularly after he introduced his "Messenger" doctrine.³ Even outsiders have commented on the "hypnotic" power of Felix Manalo's public speaking. Weber goes on to say that, "it is the recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma" (1947:359). In my interview with Teodoro Santiago I asked him if no one ever objected to the new teachings or Bible interpretations which Manalo introduced from time to time. His answer was, "No, Manalo's leadership was never questioned" (Santiago, 1973).

Corporate groups which are subject to charismatic authority in its "pure" form are characterized by an emotional form of communal relationship ("the prophet has his disciples"), by indifference to economic considerations (it is a 'misson,' not a business), and by a revolutionary stance (Weber, 1947:360-363). In its early days the *Iglesia ni Cristo* exhibited all three of these characteristics.

When the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was incorporated in 1914 it was not in a "pure" charismatic form (the very fact of

³ It is at this point that most western Christians have their greatest difficulty with many independent churches in the non-western world. The exaggerated claims which these churches so often make for their founders, though difficult to accept, should at least be seen in the context of Weber's discussion concerning the characteristics of charismatic authority. Western Christianity has also had its charismatic leaders—Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Campbell, and Booth, to mention but a few.

Readers should also be aware that Weber's use of the term "charismatic" has no relation to its use in connection with Pentecostal phenomena, such as tongues speaking. Weber is describing a sociological phenomenon, not a spiritual one.

incorporation shows that). However, note how Manalo called Santiago into service (see page 50), illustrating Weber's description that, "There is no such thing as 'appointment' . . . only a 'call' at the instance of the leader . . ." (1947:360). And, probably, the ministers working under Manalo lived at first "in a communistic relationship with their leader" (Weber, 1947:361). Manalo's intentional divesting himself of all worldly goods before beginning his preaching in November, 1913 is a classic instance of pure charisma's indifference to economic considerations.

The revolutionary nature of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* already has been emphasized. Manalo had first rebelled against the unbiblical Roman Catholicism which he knew. He then rebelled against the pluralistic Protestantism through which he had passed. He rebelled against what he considered the "dictations" of an American missionary. Through its entire history the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has been militantly anti-Catholic in a strongly Catholic culture, emphasizing its revolutionary character.

One of Weber's most significant points about charismatic authority is that in its pure form it may only exist in the process of originating (if then!). It cannot remain stable in that form; it must undergo radical change if it is to continue for any length of time. This changing of charismatic authority into some other type of authority is termed by Weber as the "routinization of charisma" (1947: 363-386).

Charismatic authority always faces a crisis when the problem of succession arises. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* was no exception. Weber states that this problem may be solved in one of four ways: (1) by searching for a new charismatic leader with similar qualities (e.g., the Tibetan Dalai Lama), (2) by revelation through oracles, lots, etc., (3) by

the original charismatic leader designating his own successor, (4) by a charismatically qualified administrative staff designating the successor (e.g., the way a new Pope is chosen) (Weber, 1947:364ff). The election of Eraño Manalo as his father's successor was thus a very significant event and was determinative for the future history of the *Iglesia*. Very likely Eraño's eldest son whom he is now grooming will succeed his father. The 'election' which occurred when Eraño was designated successor should be seen as the means by which the followers ratified the choice of the leader, not as a true election in which there was a possibility that someone else might have been elected.

Weber also points out that the routinization of charisma must also include the transformation of the administrative staff from people with a charismatic mission to those having either benefices, offices, or fiefs (1947:368). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* early, if not from the beginning, developed along the lines of a bureaucracy with definite offices. The more recent addition of educational and other non-charismatic requirements for ministers and officers is also indicative of this routinization.

In addition, to become a permanent routine structure charisma must lose its anti-economic character. "It must be adapted to some form of fiscal organization to provide for the needs of the group and hence to the economic conditions necessary for raising taxes and contributions" (Weber, 1947:369). The development of a highly organized fiscal structure within the *Iglesia ni Cristo* may find its origin as much in this process of routinization as in the exegesis of certain Scripture texts which it uses to undergird its program.

Weber emphasizes that this routinization of charisma does not usually occur without some conflict (1947:370).

Evidence of such conflict within the *Iglesia ni Cristo* seems to exist. The first is in the number of ministers who have been "expelled" during its history; most notable was Teodoro Santiago in 1952 at a time when some of these organizational matters, particularly succession, were coming to the fore. Even the minutes of the meeting at which Eraño was chosen as successor give some evidence of conflict, or at least lack of unanimity. The clearest evidence for this type of organizational conflict was the fact that an "Amended Articles of Incorporation" was submitted to the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1948, but were later withdrawn in 1952 because of "material discrepancies." These amended articles in effect clipped some of Manalo's powers, but he apparently won out and had them rescinded.

Real life never exactly fits a theoretical pattern, but it is remarkable how closely the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has fit Weber's model. It started out as almost a pure charismatic type organization but through the years has experienced a routinization of its charismatic authority structure until today it is a large, highly organized, well financed, tightly disciplined organization. The charismatic element, however, is still present (at least by ascription) in the leadership of the present head, Eraño Manalo, and his "cabinet." Having now laid the theoretical base for our discussion, we can proceed to an actual description of *Iglesia ni Cristo* organizational structure.

Organizational Structure

The original organizational structure of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is described in its Articles of Incorporation filed on July 27, 1914. This document states:

That the direction of the governing of the estates and properties of this society and the administra-

tion of the affairs of the same is the work of the Pastor or Supreme Head who is Mr. Felix Manalo, and assisted by Messers. Pedro Inocencio, Bishop; Tomas de la Cruz, Evangelist; Atanacio Morte, Secretary; Vicente Reyes, Treasurer; Serapio Dionisio, Deacon; Engracia Ramos and Honorata G. Manalo, Deaconesses;... (Iglesia ni Kristo, 1914, translated from the original Spanish.)

This original organization may be charted as follows:

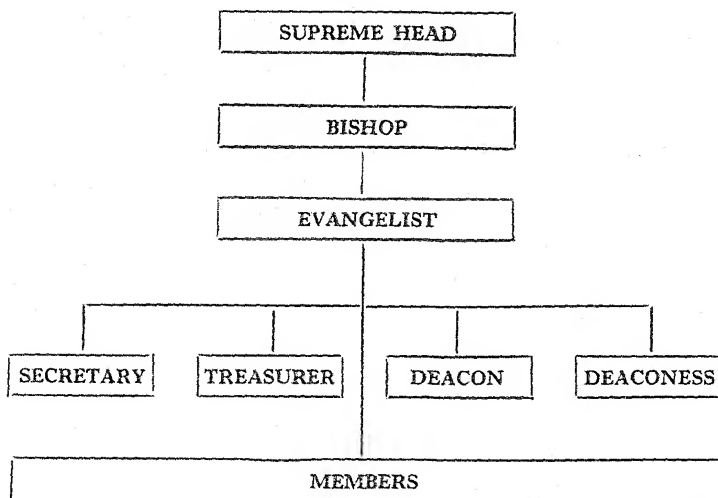


Figure 5: Original Organizational Chart

In these early days when the movement was still in its beginning stages and the members were yet few, this organization probably did not really function as a true hierarchy. What actually happened probably fits quite well Weber's description of the operation of a corporate group subject to charismatic authority in its early days.

There is no hierarchy; the leader merely intervenes in general or in individual cases when he considers the members of his staff inadequate to a task with which they have been entrusted. There is no such thing as a definite sphere of authority and of competence, and no appropriation of official powers on the basis of social privileges. There may, however, be territorial or functional limits to charismatic powers and to the individual's 'mission'. (Weber, 1947:360)

We will base our description of present-day *Iglesia ni Cristo* organization on information gathered from the 55th Anniversary of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* volume which lists all its officers with pictures, supplemented by additional information gathered from interviews. Previous discussions of *Iglesia ni Cristo* organization (e.g., Sta. Romana, 1955: 349ff, and Beach, 1972:15ff) have depended on the "Amended Articles of Incorporation" which, as we have already noted, were withdrawn in 1952 and are inoperative. Sta. Romana, however, does have much additional helpful, though dated, information gathered from her interviews.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is still incorporated as a "Corporation Sole" which under Philippine law is a corporation formed and authorized to act as a single person and endowed with the power of succession. It has no board of directors and is registered in the name of its head. As a corporation sole the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is a highly centralized organization in which the executive minister controls all aspects of the organization. Sta. Romana states:

The central office frankly admitted that in the absence of written laws and by-laws the officers are guided by the orders of the Executive Minister because the members sincerely believe that Manalo is divinely guided and, therefore, can do nothing wrong. Besides, the Executive Minister

is supposed to follow no rule but the "laws, precepts and ordinances of the Holy Bible." (1955: 349)

The concluding quote in the above paragraph is taken from the Amended Articles of Incorporation, but it reflects the words in the original Articles, ". . . all their acts will be subject to all the rules of the Gospel. . ." (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1914). All aspects of *Iglesia ni Cristo* life is under the direct control of the Executive Minister. He alone ordains new ministers. He alone may approve the organization of a new local congregation. No publication may go out without his approval. Even the weekly sermons and hymn selections are subject to his control.

But having emphasized the Executive Minister's supreme authority, we must also point out that he does not administer the work of the *Iglesia* without assistance. He has a powerful and active "cabinet" to assist him with different officers to oversee the various departments. Through the years various offices have been created so this cabinet is now made up of five officials: the Administrative Secretary (formerly Secretary General), General Evangelist, Manila Division Minister, Auditor General, and General Treasurer.

The accompanying organizational chart portrays the various levels of authority in the *Iglesia ni Cristo* and aids in visualizing the line of authority which runs from the Executive Minister down to the ordinary member. This chart shows the organization as it was in 1969 and, presumably, it has not changed since that time.

Sta. Romana calls the Secretary General (now Administrative Secretary) the "right hand of Manalo" (1955: 350). But the present occupant, Cipriano Sandoval, was designated to be Eraño's "left hand" in the 1953 election

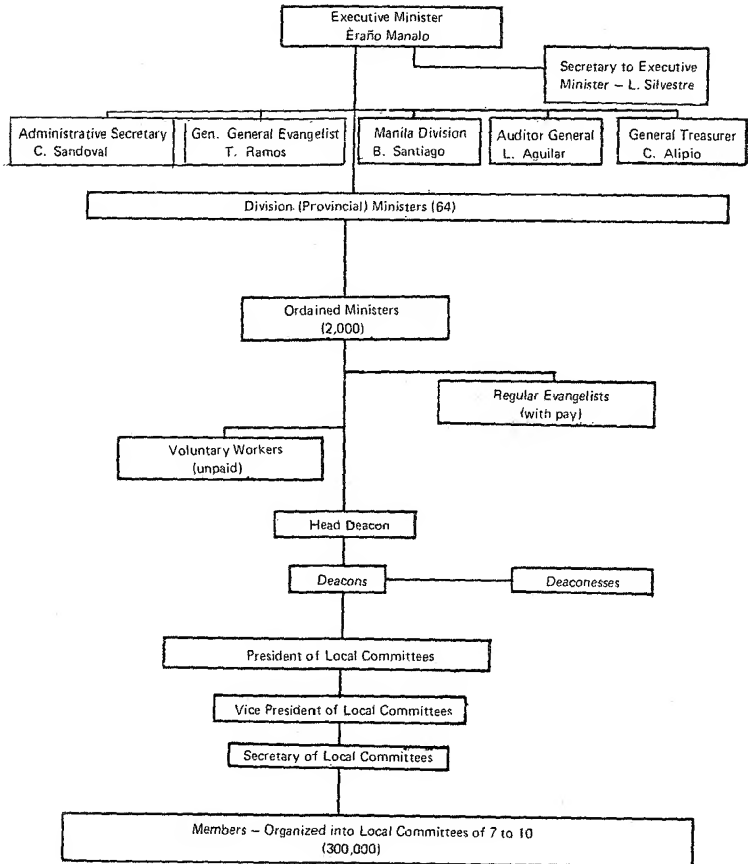


Figure 6: Organizational Chart: 1974

(see page 91). The change of the name of the office may be significant. In any case, he is a powerful man in the hierarchy, directing the administrative department subject only to the Executive Minister. He also represents the *Iglesia* at many official government functions.

The General Evangelist is apparently a rather new office (Sta. Romana does not mention it) and may have been created especially for the present incumbent, Teofilo Ramos, who in the 1953 meeting had been designated Eraño's "right hand" man. Ramos has been particularly active in public debating and writing Tagalog articles for *Pasugo*. Though small in stature, he is known as the *Iglesia's* number one debater and defender.

Benjamin Santiago is included in the cabinet as Manila Division Minister, indicating the importance of this division in the *Iglesia*. He also serves as editor of *Pasugo* magazine and may be included in the cabinet for that reason also.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* with its centralized financial system and extensive property holdings is today an institution dealing in high finances. Millions of pesos pass through its coffers yearly. The cabinet has two men, the General Treasurer and Auditor General, who deal exclusively with the church's finances. The General Treasurer receives all collections from the Division Ministers and is responsible for the general fund of the organization. The Auditor General is responsible for auditing all of the corporation's books.

These officials have large staffs working in their departments. These are now located in the large headquarters building in Diliman, Quezon City. The 55th Anniversary volume features pictures of the well-equipped and heavily staffed *Iglesia ni Cristo* offices which then occupied the

entire second floor of the F.G.R. Building on Buendia Avenue (the Philippine equivalent of Wall Street), Makati, Rizal. The picture captions note that the Finance Department which handles the auditing of the church's funds has the biggest staff. Other departments mentioned are the Administrative Department, Propagation Department, Research Department, Legal Department, and the Manila Division Office (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1969:28).

Under the cabinet in rank and directly responsible to the Executive Minister are the sixty-four Division Ministers. These ministers administer the work of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the Divisions which usually comprise a province or a half a province in the case of certain heavily churchied provinces such as Pangasinan. Sta. Romana says that the line of authority passes from the Executive Minister through the Secretary General (now Administrative Secretary) to the Division Minister (1955:351). But the change of name may have also involved a slight redefinition of role. Today the Division Ministers seem to be responsible to different members of the cabinet in connection with their own different responsibilities. For example, the Division Minister acts as the treasurer of his Division, and as such is directly responsible to the General Treasurer. But he is also responsible for the propaganda efforts of his Division, and in this capacity he is probably under the direction of the General Evangelist.

Together these Division Ministers make up a body with which the cabinet seems to act as somewhat of a Board of Directors for the organization as a whole. The fact that they were included in the 1953 meeting which decided Felix Manalo's successor is significant. Their function would seem to parallel in many ways to that of bishops in the Roman Catholic Church.

Division Ministers conduct weekly classes for local ministers, Sunday school teachers, and evangelists in their Division. Here they give the ministers the sermon outlines that they will use at the following Thursday and Sunday worship services. They drill the ministers on the way the messages are to be delivered. Division Ministers also help settle ministerial and congregational problems that may arise and may also recommend and implement discipline for erring members. They are also in charge of the provincial ministerial schools which provide the first stage of training for would-be *Iglesia* ministers.

Under the Division Ministers are the ordained ministers (ministrong regular). These are salaried ministers who care for either a large local or a circuit of smaller ones. They not only have preaching responsibilities but are actively engaged in the propagation of *Iglesia* teachings in the barrios and towns which are within their area of responsibility. These ministers also conduct training classes for workers under their jurisdiction and have administrative duties under the Division Minister. They function somewhat differently from most Protestant pastors who usually intensively care for an individual congregation and are only minimally concerned with the extension of the Faith.

Regular evangelists or preachers ("regular" always means "with pay") and voluntary workers follow ordained ministers in rank and are mainly active in indoctrination of new members, as well as working with the ministers in their various programs of outreach.

Much of the strenght of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* organization lies in the fact that it extends down to the individual member. No one is excluded. The local congregation reflects the hierarchical structure of the entire church.

The local organization is headed by the Head Deacon who is directly responsible to the minister. Under the head deacon are the other deacons and deaconesses. Then the entire congregation, no matter how large, is divided into "committees" made up of from seven to ten members. These committees have a President, Vice President, and Secretary. Every member belongs to a committee, and each committee President is responsible to keep close tabs on each member of his committee. *Iglesia* members insist that this tight organization is as much a means for spiritual growth and a mobilization for mission as it is a means for discipline. Unlike so many Protestant churches in the Philippines, no *Iglesia* member is left on the sidelines. No member can just "disappear." Implications of this tightly organized membership will be further developed in the following chapter.

"Interior" Versus "Exterior" Government

Transfer to another geographical area is a very effective means of ministerial discipline in the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. One informant told me that if an *Iglesia* minister needed to be disciplined, he could be transferred out of the area within one week. He challenged me, "Could you Baptists do this?"

Ministerial discipline in the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is not limited to the lower ranks of the hierarchy, but it extends to the higher ranks as well. Only the Executive Minister is exempt. This led my informants to speak of a "**pamamahalang exterior**," ("exterior government") versus a "**pamamahalang interior**" ("interior government"). The "exterior government" was the organization as outsiders knew it, but the "interior government" was what was actually going on inside the organization. For example, at one point

Teofilo Ramos incurred Felix Manalo's displeasure because of the reported elopment of Ramos' daughter. Ramos was therefore transferred out of the Manila office for a few months but then was reinstated. Another official was reportedly transferred temporarily to Cebu as a disciplinary move. Felix Manalo seems to have shaken up his staff once in awhile to keep them from becoming too secure in their positions.

However, the increasingly institutionalized nature of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* and the inevitable routinization of charismatic authority which we have describe earlier makes it very likely that this type of arbitrary transfer of staff personnel has drastically lessened. The concept of interior versus exterior government, though valid during Felix Manalo's day, may no longer describe the situation under Eraño Manalo. Today *Iglesia* officials administer large staffs and would hardly be transferred because of a passing whim of the Executive Minister in spite of his obvious power.

The Ministry

Protestant churches and missions in the Philippines suffer no lack of Bible schools, colleges and seminaries. Over the years these schools have produced many biblically and theologically trained men. Yet many Protestant denominations still face a ministerial supply problem. And the problem is not primarily due to rapid multiplication of churches. Economics, the "brain drain" (emigration to the United States and Canada), inadequate image of the ministry, and inappropriate educational philosophies have all taken their toll (see Sanders, 1964, and Tuggy, Toliver, 1972:155ff, for further discussion of this problem).

In contrast, a recent issue of *Pasugo* (August, 1973) features a full cover photograph of Eraño Manalo in the process of ordaining a group of 255 new ministers of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* to augment its already strong force of ministers serving throughout the Philippines, and now branching out into the United States, Canada, and England. How has the *Iglesia ni Cristo* been able to solve the problem of supplying a trained leadership for its multiplying congregations? How are its ministers recruited? How does it train them? How are they supported? What are their functions? These are the questions we will address ourselves to in the remainder of this chapter.

Recruitment

Broadly speaking, churches have followed two quite different approaches to ensure an adequate supply of ministers for their congregations. The most familiar to Catholics and most Protestants is for young men, usually from good church families, to offer themselves to their church for ministerial service. These are then enrolled (in the Catholic Church at quite an early age) in a seminary ("seed bed") or Bible school for a period of formal Bible and theological training. After graduation from school they are considered ready for ordination. Often, a short period of probation or "practical work" is required before ordination.

A less familiar, though very effective, form of recruitment is the apprentice system of training. In this system a rather large number of men of a fairly wide age span work along with ministers of the church as they witness, teach, preach, and carry out their other duties. The minister is able to observe these men in real-life situations, as well as teach them. They can choose those whom they feel are particularly suited for the ministry and encourage

them to complete their training and become ministers. This second approach, in contrast to the first, places no special premium on youth. Advancement to ordination is based more on what the person has already accomplished in ministry, rather than on the completion of a prescribed course of study. Originally, ministers in the United States were trained this way.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* largely follows this second approach. However, the church is growing older and is becoming a third generation church. *Iglesia* parents are becoming interested in their sons becoming *Iglesia* ministers, so more young men are enrolling in the ministerial classes. A recruitment and training program may be emerging which combines features of both patterns described above.

In any case, because every *Iglesia* minister makes sure that a group of men gathers around him and accompanies him in his propagandizing activities, a steady stream of recruits into the *Iglesia* ministry is assured. We have already referred to the Pasugo cover photograph featuring 255 newly ordained ministers, proving that the *Iglesia* is indeed successful in its recruitment efforts. A striking feature of these new ordinands is their mature appearance. No "boyish" faces are to be seen, and most of the men appear to be in their thirty's and forty's.

Training

In his writings Peter Wagner has popularized the phrase "seminaries in the streets" to describe ministerial training programs which are fundamentally "in service" programs and in which advancement or graduation is based upon actual performance, not academic class-room achievement (cf. Wagner, 1973:89ff). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* ministerial program, though it includes a School of Ministry

founded in 1929 by Teodoro Santiago (Sta. Romana, 1955: 355), should be seen as another example of a "seminary in the streets" which requires immediate use outside of the class-room of what is taught in the classes.

An *Iglesia ni Cristo* member who wants to become a minister today must go through a certain number of steps — as opposed to completing a certain number of courses. An informant who had been an *Iglesia* ministerial student himself before being disciplined out of the program for doubting the "commissionship" of Manalo outlined these steps as follows.

1. The candidate must approach the head deacon and request approval as a ministerial student. His previous record in the church is considered. Today, in contrast to an earlier day when the requirement was "the mental ability, the time, and the will to study" (Sta. Romana, 1955:355), he must be at least a high school graduate.
2. Upon approval for training the candidate enrolls in a training class in his local. This class is taught by a local minister and meets twice a week in the evening. The course of study is an intensive review of all *Iglesia ni Cristo* doctrine, using mimeographed lessons prepared in Manila. Sta. Romana describes this first stage of training as the "guro" ("teacher") stage and says it is open to both men and women (1965:356). Those enrolled in this course begin their church service by teaching the lessons they have been taught in local Sunday school classes. When they gather for their training class sessions they are also asked to report on how many they have "missioned."
3. After having completed this course of study (the course is of no set length, advancement is measured by actual accomplishment), male candidates may be approved to study at "Central" — the School of Ministry in Manila. Much weeding out

occurs at this stage. At the School of ministry classes are held every day and again consist mainly in drill in Iglesia doctrines, as well as familiarization with Iglesia administrative procedures. At the School of Ministry during the days of Felix Manalo the men would have personal contact with him. He would teach one of the classes, and no one could be ordained without his personal approval. Whether Eraño Manalo is maintaining such close personal supervision of the training program is doubtful.

4. Ordination is the final step. By this time many have dropped out of the program, but many of these continue on as some type of worker—teacher, evangelist, worker—depending on their abilities. But only the ordained men are considered “ministers.”

How are *Iglesia* training classes actually conducted? Sta. Romana gives us a description of an evening local worker's class:

The afternoon classes always begin with a prayer. Before they go to the lesson proper, announcements if any are made and some caution or advice about their work is given by the presiding Division Minister. The presiding minister explains the lessons and if a verse must be read from the Bible he gives the name of the book, the chapter and the verse and the assigned reader who may be a local minister, more often a “manggagawa” or “guro,” opens the Bible and reads. If he makes a mistake in reading or pronunciation right there and then the presiding minister corrects that mistake. The reader must be familiar with the different books of the Bible and he has to memorize the places of the various chapters and verses so that the lesson can proceed smoothly. After the lessons which usually last an hour or more, prayers are again said before they adjourn. (1955:356)

Other observers have confirmed that the students are intensively drilled in the proper reading of the proof-texts, especially on how to emphasize key words.

An evangelist or worker ("manggagawa") must develop debating and propagandizing skills. He can only do this by actually engaging in debates with leaders of other churches. He actively seeks out opportunities to debate, and, as Sta. Romana says, "He must take care not to make a slip which may mean his defeat in that debate. . . . His defeat will also mean the embarrassment of the *Iglesia*" (1955:357). I once observed three young *Iglesia* workers who were embarrassed in a confrontation with a Baptist pastor, and the news that came back to us from a contact within the *Iglesia* was that these men had been severely reprimanded by their minister for their lack of skill.

During Felix Manalo's time ordination was a very difficult hurdle to clear. Sta. Romana describes in detail an ordination service (these are only held once a year) which she attended and at which only thirteen candidates were ordained (1955:357-363). The candidates had had a thorough physical examination by an *Iglesia* doctor at San Lazaro in Manila and had been given an oral examination by a Board of Examiners. At the end of the service, Sta. Romana reports,

. . . The audience remarked that the old man (Manalo) was obviously in a good mood for he ordained all candidates who were selected by the Board of Examiners.

They recalled that there was a time when a candidate crossed his legs while the sermon was being delivered and which was noticed by the Supreme Brother. The candidate was disqualified at the final hour just for an unconscious act of his tired feet. Of course the members believed that the disqualified candidate was not really meant by God to be ordained that year. (1955:363)

Since a total of 255 ministers were ordained in 1973 by Eraño Manalo, he would not have been able to devote the personal attention to each candidate that his father did in earlier years. The charisma has again been "routinized" in this situation, but the new efficiency may be appreciated by many *Iglesia* leaders.

Support

In many Philippine churches ministerial support is a critical problem. In our book, *Seeing the Church in the Philippines*, we discuss this problem and make the observation that "no large denomination can afford to engage in extensive pastoral subsidy" (Tuggy, Toliver, 1972:151). However, we did not point out that large churches which have both a centralized financial program (all monies go to "Central") and a large corps of volunteer workers operating under a smaller number of well-paid ministers do not have a pastoral support problem. The two obvious examples in the Philippines are the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Neither church experiences any difficulty in properly supporting its ministers. Both exhibit the two characteristics noted above.

What is the support level of *Iglesia ni Cristo* ministers?⁴ Sta. Romana, on the basis of her interviews with Teodoro Santiago, reports that the pre-War salary of local ministers ranged from ₱5.00 to ₱40.00 (\$2.50 to \$20.00) a month. In about 1950 the scale was from ₱50 to ₱150. This harmonizes with the statement of one of my informants who stated that the salary of a local minister in 1955 was from ₱200 to ₱300 (\$100 to \$150) a month. Today,

⁴ To provide a base for comparison, minimum wage for day laborers since the war has been about \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day. School teachers' salaries range from \$50 to \$75 a month. The rate of exchange has increased from ₱2.00 to \$1.00 (pre-War and post-War until 1960), to ₱4.00 to \$1.00 through most of the 1960's, and since devaluation in 1969 has risen to about ₱7.00 to \$1.00.

because of devaluation and inflation, the salary of a local minister would probably run from about P400 to P600 a month, possibly more. This would be approximately the same as the salaries of secondary school teachers. Apparently Division ministers are paid two to three times this amount.

Teodoro Santiago told Sta. Romana that he began with the *Iglesia* (in 1916) at P5.00 (\$2.50) a month, but when he left the church in 1952, he was receiving P1,000 (\$500) a month with free room and board. He was also provided a jeep and had been given a diamond ring valued at P8,000 but he returned these items when he left the *Iglesia* (Sta. Romana, 1955:351). Today high *Iglesia* officials could be receiving P3,000 or more a month.

Beside every new chapel a very adequate minister's residence is erected. In earlier days *Iglesia* ministers had to undergo many hardships (the P5.00 pre-War minimum was not a living wage even then; it was more like transportation money), but today the support level seems to be quite adequate. According to Sta. Romana, the minister's salaries are at least partly determined by their loyalty, ability, and income of their division and locals (1955:351).

Functions

In the Philippines Protestants most frequently refer to their ministers as "pastors," even in direct address. In contrast *Iglesia ni Cristo* ministers are always called "minister," never "pastor." As a result, the meanings of the two words, at least for Tagalog speakers, have drifted apart, so that today, instead of meaning "one who serves," the word "ministro" has the connotation of "one who dominates."

This is significant because the *Iglesia ni Cristo* minister is not expected to "care" for a congregation in a pastoral way. That is more the responsibility of the head deacon. An *Iglesia* minister's responsibilities lie primarily in three areas: church administration, indoctrination of members, and propagation or mission.

A vital link in the line of authority, the local minister administers *Iglesia* affairs on the local level. He transmits funds from the locals to the Division Minister. He makes sure that the head deacons under his jurisdiction are fulfilling their responsibilities. He takes care of most local disciplinary problems and sees that the various local organizations are functioning properly. He schedules regular and special events for the local or locals for which he is responsible. Administration looms large in *Iglesia* thinking. At every worship service in the general prayer God is asked to particularly "guide the church administration as it governs His Church."

Through worship service sermons, special church meetings, and home doctrine classes, the ministers are constantly engaged in indoctrinating their members, both new and old. The messages tend to be repetitive but are, therefore, effective instruments of indoctrination. The ministers do not bear this entire burden alone. Volunteer workers carry much of the home teaching load, but *Iglesia* ministers are exceptionally active in this type of work. Many Protestant ministers could not match the heavy schedule of classes which these ministers set up for themselves.

Since we will devote an entire chapter (chapter eight) to a study of *Iglesia* propaganda methodology, we will not discuss this part of an *Iglesia ni Cristo* minister's work in detail here. However, we must note that it is an important and demanding part of his responsibility. Through

"open forum" meetings at the locals, outdoor debates, nightly home propaganda meetings, special evangelistic meetings, and rallies *Iglesia* ministers are constantly working at spreading *Iglesia* teachings, getting new members, and planting new locals. A familiar sight in Philippine towns and barrios is the *Iglesia ni Cristo* minister (nicely attired in his "barong tagalog" dress shirt), carrying his Bible and other reference books, accompanied by a small group of men, going to a home of an interested contact to teach a "doctrine" lesson. Each minister also makes it a point to attend propaganda efforts of other churches, either to engage the leaders in debate or to follow up their contacts himself.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* organization we have described is efficiently organized to carry out its total ministry. Everyone, even the common member, knows what is expected of him. But what is especially important is not that it is so well organized, but that this organization is definitely used as a vehicle for growth. *Iglesia ni Cristo* growth is no accident. It is the result of marshaling all its resources to this one end — the propagation of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

CHAPTER 7

ITS LIFE, ETHOS, AND INDIGENEITY

Its Life and Ethos

What does it mean to be a member of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*? What are the various activities of the members? What are *Iglesia* services like? How do members see themselves and their church? How does the community at large see the *Iglesia* as it lives within it? These are the types of questions we want to deal with in this chapter. If possible, we would like to get an "inside view" of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. And there is no better way to begin than to attend one of their worship services.

Description of a Regular Worship Service

At 7:45 a.m., Sunday morning, a missionary friend and I arrived at the Baguio City *Iglesia ni Cristo* chapel. We parked the car and as we walked up the rather steep walkway, I began to talk with a young Filipino couple in Tagalog. The young man became our guide.

As we entered the chapel the husband and wife separated. The wife turned her card over in a large attendance card rack indicating her attendance. The vestibule of the chapel seemed quite plain. On the left there was a table with an offering box marked "Capilya" ("chapel") on it. We went up a flight of stairs to the left (the men's side) and entered the main sanctuary. It was almost filled so we went up another flight of stairs to the balcony. We were seated on the front row very near the center. People continued to enter both sides of the balcony. The right side was strictly for women and the left side, strictly for men. The 40-voice choir was already seated. The men ushers were

all dressed in suits. The women ushers were all in white *balintawak* (long dresses with butterfly sleeves).

At exactly 7:55 the choir stood and sang a hymn. The number of the hymn was indicated on a piece of wood on a pole standing in the center of the choir loft. After the song the ushers seated the others who had arrived by this time. At exactly 8:00 the choir stood again and sang another hymn. Some in the audience had their own hymn books. These joined in the singing, but the singing was mainly the work of the choir. It was strong, clear, but not particularly joyous singing. In fact, the choir seemed to set the rather somber mood of the worship service. Even before the first song, they were wiping their eyes with their handkerchiefs. Sometimes some seemed to be praying.

Just before the 8:00 o'clock song three ministers came on the platform. No one sat in the center seat of honor which is reserved for Eraño Manalo should he visit the chapel. The ministers were dressed in suits. After the song the minister on the left approached the left pulpit (the reader's pulpit) and prayed a rather lengthy opening prayer. His prayer was quite emotional. The people responded frequently with an audible "*opo*" (yes!). The prayer reached its first emotional peak when the minister was leading in a prayer of confession. The second emotional peak occurred when "*Kapatid na Erdie*" (Brother Eraño Manalo) was prayed for. In this part the minister prayed that "God would bless Brother Eraño wherever he is today, give him strength and wisdom, keep him from any kind of sickness or accident, so that he could lead the church on its way." It was as if the Pope was being prayed for. The minister's voice shook, and many in the audience were wiping their eyes, and responding audibly, but no one was sobbing (which, I understand, sometimes occurs).

After the prayer the choir led in another hymn. (The number on the board had been changed.) Then the lesson or sermon began. The head minister, dressed in a lighter suit, stood in the center pulpit. A small closed Bible (presumably English) lay on one side of the pulpit. The assistant minister who led in prayer stood again at the reader's pulpit with a large Tagalog Bible in hand. Each minister had a copy of the mimeographed message.

The introduction to the message was a reminder of the burdens and pressures we bear and problems we have as we live in an evil world. We look forward to the second coming of Christ when these problems will be solved. We need to endure to the end. Those that endure will be saved, not only the "*mga Iglesia ni Cristo*" (members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*) of the present day, but also those of long ago who left us examples of steadfast faith.

The message was a study (by question and Scripture answer method) of several heroes of faith: Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Paul and Peter. The members were challenged to compare their faith with the faith of these early holy men.

The method of delivery, though not unusual for the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, was different from the usual Protestant monologic sermon form. The minister would ask a question about Abraham, for example, "Why was he called a 'sojourner?'" He would then pause, and the assistant minister at the reader's pulpit would read a Bible verse (in this case, Hebrews 11:13,14). Then the minister would usually repeat with emphasis the particular part of the verse that would answer his question. During this message I noticed that no references were given. I was the only one in the audience that had a Bible and was trying to follow the Scriptures that were being read. I found that my at-

tention was riveted on the message by this approach. I noticed that the rest of the audience was also paying very close attention, even though they were familiar with this type of sermon delivery. A few times the minister departed from the prepared outline to give a short illustration or inject a humorous note, but these occasions were rare.

In his conclusion the minister emphasized that according to Revelation 21:27 no unholy person will be allowed to enter the New Jerusalem. He concluded his sermon by saying, "As we have said so often, you need to repent and live a new life!" ("Magsisi at magbagong-buhay!")

At the close of the message the choir stood to sing the offertory. The tune was the familiar "A Shelter in the Time of Storm," but the words were an original Tagalog hymn concerning giving. Each men's row had its own usher (presumably, a deacon), and each women's row had its own usherette (deaconess). These passed the offering bag for his or her row. After the bags were passed the ushers and usherettes walked to the front in two lines and each deposited his offering bag in a beautifully carved mahogany box on a table below the main pulpit. Two men then marched forward, each carrying a smaller offering box marked "Capilya" ("chapel") and set them on either side of the larger box. After the offering was deposited in the box, it was closed. The assistant minister already had come down from the platform and standing by the offering boxes was ready to lead in the closing prayer. A lady with a baby came forward. The minister led in the closing prayer at 9:00 a.m., exactly one hour after the service officially had started. He first prayed again for "Kapatid na Erdie" (Brother Eraño), and then he continued with a prayer of infant dedication. This closing prayer was all in Ilocano. (It was a Tagalog service, but Baguio City is in the Ilocano-

speaking area, and the woman who had brought her child for dedication, probably, was an Ilocana.)

After the prayer the choir and congregation sang the Doxology (Trinitarian!), and then the minister pronounced the Apostolic Benediction (also Trinitarian). Then another worker stood at the pulpit to the right of the main pulpit (this chapel had three pulpits). He read an announcement for the young people about a special worship service for them the following Saturday.

He also announced a coming evangelistic meeting ("Pamamahayag") in preparation for which nightly prayer meetings would be held the coming week. These prayer meetings were referred to as "mga pulong ng pagpapanata" ("meetings of making vows"). Members who could not attend were asked to pray at home.

After the announcements the congregation was dismissed, each row by its respective usher, or usherette. They did not begin their visiting with one another until they were out of the chapel.

It had been a very impressive service. The interior of the chapel itself with its beautifully carved mahogany furniture added to the impact. But what had impressed me most was the audience, both its size and its strict attention. At 8:00 a.m. when the last arrivals were seated, the women's side was almost completely filled to the last row of the balcony. The men's side was full to about half-way up in the balcony. The first floor was completely filled. I estimate that, including the choir, well over 850 people attended (I was not able to see the room where mothers with babies were seated). Unlike Roman Catholic services with crowds milling around the doors and people going in and out during mass, the *Iglesia* service was marked by strict audience discipline (even a visitor cannot choose where he will sit),

a worshipful (though somewhat somber) atmosphere, and close attention to all that was going on and being said. Any pastor would be grateful for such an audience. One would have to conclude that the members found the service meaningful and important.

Visits to other *Iglesia* services have filled in some gaps in this picture. Arriving early for a worship service in Los Angeles, California, for example, I was able to observe in more detail the disciplined procedure of seating the congregation as it arrives. The main hall's central aisle divided the men's section (left side) from the women's section (right side). Each side had twelve rows of seven chairs each. Six deacons were seated on the outside aisle seats, every other row. Six deaconesses in white Filipino long dresses were seated in the same way. The first deacon was standing by the first row in the outside aisle and ushering the early arrivals into their seats in the first two rows. All the chairs in these rows were soon filled with the exception of the center aisle seat, second row (which had been reserved by a rolled up offering bag), where the deacon then seated himself. As he took his seat the second deacon stood up and proceeded to fill up his two rows. This kept on until nearly all the seats were taken from front to back. The deaconesses, on their side, followed exactly the same pattern. Mothers with small children sat in the rear of the hall in a separate section.

The message at this Los Angeles service was more typically *Iglesia ni Cristo*-centered. The minister began with the statement that Jesus Christ had established only one Church and this Church was known to Paul as the "Church of Christ" (Romans 16:16). He said this church was established to save sinners, therefore, the only means to be saved was to enter the Church of Christ. Then followed a series of 25 questions and scriptural answers. The first,

"How can we recognize the true Church?" was answered by Matthew 16:18—"the true Church is the one founded on the rock." The concluding question was, "What was the apostle's advice regarding trials?" (Answer: I Peter 4:12, 13—"Don't be surprised, but rejoice.")

Again the chapel was filled, the attention good, and the service proceeded as by clockwork. English, rather than Tagalog, was used, but most of the songs were sung in Tagalog. Otherwise the service was a carbon-copy of an *Iglesia ni Cristo* service in the Philippines. *Iglesia* members from the Philippines would feel at home immediately in such a service—as indeed they did.

Members' Participation in Church Organizations

Though attendance at worship services is mandatory (to neglect them is the "worst sin!"), *Iglesia* members' church involvement does not stop there. All members, as we have previously mentioned, are included in a local committee of seven to ten members. Opportunity for even further involvement is offered by two voluntary church organizations: one for young people, the **Kapisanang Maligayang Pagtatagumpay**; the other for married couples, called the "**Buklod ng Gintong Layunin**." The *Iglesia* has discouraged the proliferation of organizations inside its over-all structure, but it has seen the value of sodality-type organizations, so it has authorized these two which cover the major age groupings. But before describing these volunteer organizations in more detail, we will look again at the local committee and describe a little more concerning its place in the life of an *Iglesia* member.

The Committees. Committees fulfill a three-fold function in the *Iglesia ni Cristo*: discipline, nurture, and mission. As an instrument of *Iglesia* discipline, committee

leaders keep close contact with members to be sure they fulfill their *Iglesia* duties. On the other hand, an *Iglesia* member may appeal to the committee for help during a time of crisis. A less well-known function of the committee is the work of spiritual upbuilding and Christian nurture. This seems to be receiving a new and special emphasis. A monthly feature in the Pasugo Supplement, "The Past Month with EGM," (Eraño G. Manalo), gave the following report, concerning Eraño Manalo's special meeting with committee leaders held on April 9, 1973,

The leaders of the prayer meeting groups popularly known among the brethren as the "committee" saturated the towering house of worship in Juan Luna and Moriones Streets in Tondo. A special service was officiated for them by Brother Eraño G. Manalo.

Utilizing the Holy Scriptures, he expounded on the importance of the "committee." He said that during the time of Moses, he grouped the Israelites into gatherings of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens to facilitate administration.

Brother EGM outlined the other reasons for the formation of the "committees" as written in Ephesians 4:12 which are also the intention of the Church Administration, thus: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Through the "committees," he declared one can exhort or do good to another in love and good works.

He said that the leaders of the "committees" will be accountable to the Lord "as the Lord hath called everyone, so let him walk" (I Corinthians 7:17). Leading the "committee," he said, is a gift of God which should be carried out. Brother Erdy emphasized that God hears the prayer-meetings and these gatherings are His. (The Pasugo Supplement, June, 1973:D,E)

Note that Eraño Manalo highlighted the committee's nurturing function, as well as its disciplinary (which he called 'administrative') function. To refer to the committee meetings as "prayer meetings" seems to be a new and healthy development.

The *Iglesia* has found that its members function more effectively in outreach when they act as a group. An informant told me that for a period the *Iglesia* encouraged an "each one win one" type of outreach program. It was not very successful, he reported; so now the emphasis is on the committees acting as units in making contacts for the church and following them up. He indicated that the newer program involved members more effectively in mission than the previous one-to-one approach.

The Kapisanang Maligayang Pagtatagumpay (KMP). Before the Second World War as the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was growing and its organization was becoming more formalized, Felix Manalo saw the importance of developing some kind of young people's organization, an *Iglesia* equivalent of the YMCA. So in 1935 the "**Tambuli ng Silangan**" ("The Bugle of the East") was organized with Manalo's blessing. Its purpose was "to guide each youth in leading spiritual lives." Its activities "centered on helping add color to the propagandas (sic) and evangelical rallies" (Pastor, 1964: 217). But when war struck, the **Tambuli** became a casualty of the hardships and disorder of the time. Yet Pastor notes that its success can be seen in the fact that most of its active members are now *Iglesia* ministers (1964:217).

In 1947 moves began to revive the pre-war youth organization. At first this was done at the local level with no centralized administration of the program. Each local in Manila soon had its own independent organization with its own name. At Tayuman the young people formed the

Ilaw at Pag-asa ("Light and Hope") while at Baclaran they joined the Sulo sa Silangan ("The Torch of the East"). Once a year on Manalo's birthday, the various groups would gather together at the Quiapo local for a great celebration.

In 1952 the church administration began to bring all these groups together into one over-all organization, and in 1953 "*Kapisanang Maligayang Pagtatagumpay*" (*KMP*) became the official name of the reorganized youth organization. The name means "Happy Victory Association," a translation of Felix Manalo's name. The Manila Division adopted the *KMP* program for all its locals, and all of the other divisions quickly followed suit.

The *KMP* performs three basic functions in *Iglesia* life. First of all, it provides many opportunities for social interaction among the young people through its many activities and sports programs. The *Iglesia* considers these social opportunities especially important "to lessen the temptation of marrying non-INC members" (Pastor, 1964:217). Secondly, the *KMP* provides vocational guidance for its young people and along with this has instituted a program of vocational training. In 1960 it founded the New Era Fashion School to teach interested girls dressmaking. More recently, this school has added other vocational courses and has been renamed, "New Era Training Center." The *Iglesia ni Cristo* shows its interest in raising its members' living standard through this program, and belies the statements of outsiders that the *Iglesia* is only interested in enriching itself at the expense of its members. Of course, the *Iglesia* does benefit financially from the increased earning power of its members, but its members raise socially in the process.

The third function of the *KMP* is to mobilize *Iglesia* young people for mission. From the beginning a primary purpose of *Iglesia* youth organizations has been to enlist the

help of the young people in the various propagandizing efforts of the church. A pastor tells of how Manila Division young people helped other divisions in their missionary activities exemplified by a 1962 house-to-house campaign in Sta. Rosa and Biñan, Laguna to invite non-members to attend *Iglesia* rallies held in those towns (1964:221). This is another example of the *Iglesia's* singleminded purpose to mobilize all of its activities and organizations for the task of expanding the church. It does not simply give lip-service to the concept of church growth; it sees to it that its organizations become actively involved in its outreach work. The social and vocational functions would not be sufficient reason for the **KMP** to exist. The missionary function justifies its existence.

The Buklod. The adults were not to be outdone by the young people. On November 30, 1962 a group of young married couples, most of whom had been officials of **KMP** in earlier years, met with Eraño Manalo and Teofilo Ramos for an evening meal. They told the church leaders of their desire to form an organization for married couples which would be a counterpart to the **KMP**. The *Iglesia* administration quickly agreed and launched the new organization at a special worship service in Tayuman on February 13, 1963 with the name, **Buklod ng Gintong Layunin** ("Circle of the Golden Purpose"), or simply "**Buklod**."

The **Buklod** has four "golden" purposes:

1. To produce model parents and husbands and wives in each home who are established and firm in serving God. Its text in this is Matthew 19:6, "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder."
2. To help in the work of the Church, especially in mission. In this the **Buklod** works closely with the **KMP**.

3. To strengthen the spirit of brotherhood in the *Iglesia*, through fellowship and good understanding in any way that is not contrary to the teaching of God. Psalm 133:1
4. To help the brothers learn to earn an honorable and steady income, especially through offering vocational courses.

(Summarized from original Tagalog, Ambuyo, 1964:51,52)

Recent issues of *Pasugo* indicate that both the **KMP** and **Buklod** are very much alive and active. The *Pasugo* Supplement of August, 1973, for example, announced the appointment of three new regional coordinators for the **Buklod**, as well as a special Manila Division **KMP** drive (with the **Buklod**) to encourage planting of vegetables and fruits, and poultry and livestock raising. It also announced an essay contest on the theme, "The Importance of Parents."

The *Iglesia* forbids its members to join many outside organizations, especially labor unions and secret societies. It argues that if a member joined a labor union and then had to strike against an *Iglesia* employer, this would destroy the unity of the church. However, the two very active church organizations which we have described above meet so many of the felt-needs of members, that probably little desire to join other organizations exists.

"Compounds" and Barrio "Maligaya"

Iglesia ni Cristo members believe that theirs is the only true Church and see themselves as a persecuted minority. This has tended to make them clannish, and like other folks, they enjoy living and working among their own kind. With such a mentality, and with the growing financial power of the *Iglesia*, the development of "compounds" is not a surprising development. A "compound" in *Iglesia* terminology is a tract of land, usually adjoining a chapel,

which has been opened to occupancy by *Iglesia* members. Chapels at Taytay, Rizal, and at Riverside, San Juan, are two examples. Sometimes a group of members may band together and move to a new place, and the *Iglesia* may buy property there for a chapel and allow members to build houses on the lot.

By far the most elaborate and impressive of these compounds is Barrio Maligaya ("happy," again from Felix), located in the Sierra Madre foothills in Nueva Ecija. This 600 hectare resettlement project grew out of the harrassment by union members of *Iglesia* employees employed by the Luisita Hacienda in Concepcion, Tarlac. Rosquites tells the story of its founding, replete with Old Testament metaphors.

The "exodus" occurred on February 22, 1965. There were 145 families in all who pulled their stakes from Hacienda Luisita, leaving persecution and hostility behind, singing the Church hymn "Ako'y Iglesia ni Cristo" as they walked towards the waiting trucks that brought them to refuge, to freedom. The trip was arduous, especially to the little children and to the mothers who had to watch over them.

Maligaya, even then undeveloped, was a welcome sight to the new settlers. They poured down from the vehicles, jubilant but awed by the truth that this was to be their land, and to be the land of their children, and their children's children after them. It was the Lord's will that brought them from desperation into this place of promise. But there were still many things to look after. The coming months were still uncertain, and they had to buckle down to work with their bare hands, to show the Lord how much they acknowledged His merciful deeds. (1969:31, 32)

The land did not flow with "milk and honey" without hard work and some careful planning. However, by 1971 the Manila Daily Bulletin was able to report the following:

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has embarked on a program of land reform by distributing for free titles for one hectare land each to all farmers settled at the barrio Maligaya Community Development . . .

The barrio, in six years time, has progressed from a cogonal (tall grass) jungle into one of the most progressive barrios in the country.

The barrio has water and electric facilities, an irrigation complex, neat rows of duplex houses, a health center, a common motor pool and modern farm machineries, asphalted roads, school buildings for primary, elementary and high school education, a concrete structure for hog raising, a rice mill and warehouses, a concrete church built on top of a hill, and a picnic grove. (November 2, 1971)

The *Iglesia* considers Barrio Maligaya a highly successful experiment which it is likely to repeat in the future. *Iglesia ni Cristo* members' self-image could not help but be enhanced by this success story.

The Function of Ornate Cathedral-Chapels and Headquarters Building

Many outsiders have seen the large, beautifully constructed cathedral-chapels of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as evidence that the *Iglesia* financially exploits its members simply to display the organization's earthly glory. And now that a new headquarters building has been built that rivals the Presidential palace, they feel that their suspicions have been confirmed. But how do the members feel about these expensive buildings? Do they fulfill an important function in the life of the church?

Again, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* believes that it is the people of God in these last days, and it believes that it should act the part. In a long sermon-article (profusely illustrated with pictures of *Iglesia* chapels), Lucio B. Silvestre traces

the history of the meeting places of the people of God. He begins with Moses and the building of the tabernacle, then moves on to the building and dedication of Solomon's Temple, after which he describes Herod's Temple and tells of its destruction. Then he says:

The house of God is indispensable for the service and worship of God. It is the center of religious activities of the people of God. The Church of Christ from the Philippines, being the last group of the children of God by virtue of the scriptural prophecy has undertaken and still is undertaking the program of chapel construction in many parts of this country. Why is the present administration of the Church of Christ in the Philippines pursuing the program of building houses of worship in as many places in the Philippines as there are many local congregations? This is so because the Lord Christ Jesus said:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do: because I go unto my father" (John 14:12).

Christ has ascended to heaven and now sitteth on the right hand of God. Before He ascended to heaven He foresaw and predicted His faithful believers to do greater works than He has done to the glory of His Father in heaven. What are these works that are great in the eyes of God? These great works are spoken of with reference to the construction and building of houses of God. When King Solomon succeeded in erecting the first temple of God, he said, "the house which I build is great: for great is our God, above all gods" (II Chronicles 2:5). There could be no greater works of faith other than the construction of magnificent chapels for the glory of the Lord God in heaven." (*Iglesia ni Cristo*, 1969:26)

To *Iglesia* members then, their magnificent houses of worship are a sign that the *Iglesia* is the true Church. Mem-

bers may live in humble surroundings, but they worship in the finest chapels in the Philippines. They may not own their own homes, but they feel that these houses of worship are "theirs." The sheer size of the buildings fuel the fires of an emerging triumphalism.

A "number two tries harder" psychology may be at work here also. For centuries every Philippine city and town has been dominated by its Roman Catholic cathedrals built by drafted labor on donated ground. But many of these are now old and dilapidated. *Iglesia ni Cristo* cathedral-chapels now rival these ancient buildings in size and surpass them in beauty. *Iglesia* members still number only a minority of the population, but their buildings dominate many city sky lines. The prestige value of this fact is incalculable. *Iglesia* members, poor though they may be, bask in the reflected glory, realizing at the same time that their church is also interested in helping them find a better livelihood. Outsiders need to realize that these well built chapels are another reason why the *Iglesia* cannot simply be wished away. It plans to be around for a long time to come, judging from its architecture.

Finances and Giving

To be an *Iglesia ni Cristo* member is to give to its support. Finances necessarily loom large in *Iglesia* life, and though many outsiders are extremely critical of its approach to finances and giving, we must try to see this aspect of its life from the members' point of view. An *Iglesia* member from a fairly low income bracket remarked to me, "Why do outsiders always complain about our giving in the *Iglesia*? If we choose to give generously, what is that to them? It's not their money. Why should they criticize us?" Why, indeed? Every religious movement needs finances. And giving, after all, is a healthy spiritual exercise.

But more needs to be said, and a somewhat negative note sounded. The *Iglesia*, while teaching free-will giving, does put heavy pressure on its members to give through various means. On one occasion, for example, the *Iglesia* minister of Sariaya, Quezon, in a home meeting was stressing the importance of giving generously to the approaching year-end thanksgiving offering. He warned his members that if they sold a pig in order to give to the offering and then withheld any portion of the sale price, they would be guilty of Ananias and Sapphira's sin (Acts 5:1-11), and they would be liable to suffer the same type of punishment—death.

The same thanksgiving offering is the occasion of much inter-local and inter-member competition. As at fiestas among Catholics, *Iglesia* members will go into debt to make an impressive offering. At the same time, we must grant that the thanksgiving offering is the high point of excitement of the *Iglesia* year, and not to participate would be unthinkable for an *Iglesia* member. On January first of every year each local brings its offering to the head chapel in the Division, after which the gathered offering is brought to Manila, often in an armored car with Philippine Constabulary escort. In sum, to give generously "feels good" to an *Iglesia* member. That some of the money goes into ostentatious display is unfortunate, but no vital church function appears to be curtailed as a consequence. The strength of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* undeniably rests on a solid financial base with an annual income running into millions of pesos.

The *Iglesia* Ethos Seen In Its Hymnody

Throughout the history of the Church and among many peoples Christians have expressed their faith through the

songs they sing. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is no exception, though because its theology differs from that of historic Christianity, it has written all of its own hymns. The *Iglesia* hymnal contains 319 hymns, many of which were written by Mrs. Pilar Manalo Danao, Felix Manalo's eldest daughter. The tunes, however, are familiar. Gordon England, a professional musicologist from the United States visited several *Iglesia* services and commented, "I did not hear a tune that I did not know, or that the style and parts of the tune didn't sound familiar" (1974). We are here interested in the words. Can we discover anything about the *Iglesia* self-image from a study of its hymns?

We look first at the *Iglesia* "Theme Song:"

AKO'Y IGLESIA NI CRISTO

Ako'y Iglesia ni Cristo
 Ang Iglesiang hinulaan
 Nakatanim sa puso ko
 Lahat Niyang aral.

Si Cristo ay susundin ko
 Anoman ang kasapitan
 Ako'y Iglesia ni Cristo
 Hanggang kamatayan.

Koro:

Ako'y laging maglilingkod
 Sa Dios at kay Jesus
 Ang hirap at pag-uusig
 Aking matitiis.

I AM INDEED A CHURCH OF CHRIST⁵

(translation)

I am indeed a Church of Christ
 The only Church in prophecy
 And written deep within my heart
 All teachings given me.

Whate'er befall, whate'er betide
 I'll follow Jesus all the way
 For I'm indeed a Church of Christ
 Till death my life would claim.

Chorus:

'Tis life I offer to my God
 To serve Him and my Lord
 All sufferings, persecution
 All these I can endure.

Note the emphasis upon the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as the only true Church and how following Christ is tied in with remaining faithful to the church. In the chorus a distinction is made between God and Jesus (this is clearer in the Tagalog version). Reference is also made to sufferings and persecution.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* definitely sees itself as a suffering, persecuted church. Note for example, the following hymn:

⁵ Most translations of poetry from one language to another seem wooden. These hymns were originally written in Tagalog. The English translation of the INC theme song was done by the Iglesia itself. The other translations were either done by myself or Sta. Romana.

O hindi ko ikahahapis
ang sa akin ay pag-uusig
Kung dahil sa Iyong pag-ibig
Matitiis ko yaong sakit.

(translation)

O, I do not mourn
The persecution I suffer,
Since because of Your love
I can bear the pain.

Iglesia members look forward to life after death as a time when sorrow and persecution will be ended:

Kung tayo man ay nagtiyaga
At nagsikap sa tungkulin
Ang Dios naman ay naghanda
Ng bagong tahanan natin.

Koro:

Tayo doo'y di magluluksa
Doo'y wala ng pag-uusig
Doo'y pawang pagpapala
Walang hirap at ligalig

(translation)

If we shall persevere
And be faithful to our task;
God will prepare
A new home for us.

Chorus:

There, we will not mourn.
There will be no more persecution.
There, all will be blessing,
No hardship and trouble.

The verse of this song conditions salvation on faithfulness to the task. This emphasis is repeated in other songs, as well. Other hymns emphasized repentance ("I am meditating Father, on the sins I have committed"), mission ("The work of God in the Last Day, carried through with courage, is to rescue men from darkness and bring them to the light"). A recessional emphasizes attendance at services ("Will you come back, my brother, to the scheduled service?") (Sta. Romana, 1955:422-425). Most of the songs are sung at a slow tempo and often have a sad quality about them that encourages the members to wipe tears from their eyes as they sing. The songs of dismissal, however, are sung with a martial tempo, so that though services begin in a somber mood, they end on a rousing note.

The *Iglesia* hymns truly express the feelings of the members. They see themselves as the true "little flock," persecuted, yet persevering. No rejoicing in assurance of salvation is expressed, but rather great confidence that theirs is the true Church. Gordon England observes, "Their singing is meaningful to them. There is a fairly good level of participation. The sound in the big churches full of people is pleasing and inviting to sing along" (1974).

Its Indigeneity

What Is An Indigenous Church?

The question, "What is an indigenous church?" is logically prior to that of how indigenous is the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. We must clarify the concept before we can meaningfully apply it. We also need to adopt a theoretical model which we can apply to the specific case which we are studying, that our conclusions can be judged in the light of our

underlying presuppositions. Our purpose, therefore, in this section is not only to say something about the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, but also to contribute to the development of the body of missiological theory concerning indigeneity.

Missionaries and church leaders are familiar with the "three-self" definition of indigeneity which traces back over a century to the early pioneer missiologists Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. Contemporary mission writers such as Melvin Hodges and others continue to stress these three characteristics of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation as the fundamental marks of an indigenous church. And usually the emphasis is in that order in the missionaries' thinking, the elimination of foreign subsidy being seen as the one essential step needed to make a church "indigenous." National church leaders, on the other hand, often put their stress on the second "self"—self-government. Battles have been fought over these matters, and the term "indigenous church," instead of being a helpful guideline to give direction for missionary strategy, has often degenerated into a weapon with which to beat down an opponent. Some missiologists have recently suggested other terms not so emotionally charged, such as the "responsible church" (Beyerhaus and Lefever, 1964).

But somehow we are left with the feeling that the basic issues were being missed in this emphasis upon the three "selves." (The *Iglesia ni Cristo* from its beginning would qualify completely as an indigenous church under the three-self definition. But to say simply this does not add materially to our insight into its nature.) William A. Smalley put his finger on the real problem when he pointed out in an early issue of *Practical Anthropology* that the goal of missions was something more profound than establishing "Three-self" churches. The word "indigenous" itself directs our attention to the environment within which the church

is growing, but this had not been stressed by most of those using the term. Indigeneity lies, as Charles Kraft points out, in **how** the selfhood of the church is expressed, not only in characteristics having to do with funding or even form of church government (1973a:39).

Smalley defines an indigenous church as:

a group of believers who live out their life, including their socialized Christian activity, in the patterns of the local society, and for whom any transformation of that society comes out of their felt needs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures (1958:55).

He also points out that by definition, "as a society (the church) has its patterns of interaction among people. If it is an indigenous church, those patterns of interaction will be based upon such patterns existing in the local society" (1958:55). Here we get the clue that if we would want to measure indigeneity, we could well begin by looking at its patterns of interaction. To further help us understand the dynamics involved in the growth of an indigenous church, Smalley reminds us that an indigenous church is **planted not founded**, so it **grows** and is not simply **built**. Though an oversimplification, this statement helpfully portrays an indigenous church as a living organism.

In a further attempt to deliver the concept of the indigenous church from the ambiguities which have grown up around it, Charles H. Kraft suggests that we take a page out of the modern Bible translators' notebook by applying the translators' term "dynamic equivalence" to churches as well as to Bible translations. Eugene Nida originated this term to refer to a translation of the Bible which seeks to have the same impact on the modern reader within his own cultural setting as the original Scriptures had on the first readers. Equivalence of response, not of

form is the goal. As Kraft says, "This new concept of what is involved in translating the Bible allows for the complexity of each language and the process of moving concepts from one language to another" (1973a:44). The process of dynamic equivalence translating involves going to the original text of Scripture and trying to determine accurately the meaning it had for its original readers and what impact it would have had on them within their respective cultures, and then seeking to convey these same meanings accurately and with equivalent impact for readers in the receptor language.

Kraft suggests that we can apply this concept of "dynamic equivalence" to churches. From the New Testament we can discover not only what were the cultural forms exhibited by the early Church as it grew in the various societies of its day, but we can also sense some of the impact which these churches had on their surrounding cultures. What today's churches should aim for, Kraft suggests, is not equivalence of form with the early Church, but an equivalence of impact. The forms may well have to be changed, but the meanings conveyed and the impact made should be the same.

This concept of "dynamic equivalence churchness" has three focuses. First, it focuses on the New Testament Church seen in its historico-socio-cultural context. If churches today are to be dynamically equivalent to the early Church then we must accurately know the Christian meanings conveyed by the early Church. The second focus is on the cultural context in which today's churches are growing. As the Bible translator needs to have a profound understanding of the language into which he is translating the Bible, so today's churchman needs to have an intimate knowledge of the culture in which the church is growing. The foreignness, or conversely, the indigeneity of the cul-

tural forms used in church life cannot be sensed without comparison with the cultural forms used in the surrounding culture. The dynamic equivalence concept focuses on the actual impact of the living church on its community. How do the people around the church actually see it? Do they perceive its relevance to their lives? Can they readily grasp the meanings that the church seeks to convey? Or does the church appear as a foreign imposition?

Complex problems confront us as we analyze dynamic equivalence at each of its three focuses. But this fact does not negate the concept itself. Just as we assume that whatever can be said in one language can be said in another (though it may be very difficult to make the proper translation) so we may assume that a church today can have an equivalent impact in its society to that of the early Church in its society. But having said this we must admit that the complexities almost make us despair of being able to meaningfully "measure" this dynamic equivalence. We may point out that even within the New Testament not all the churches portrayed are "dynamically equivalent." Witness the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2, 3. But most Christians believe that the New Testament does provide us with a normative picture of the Church. Even the negative judgments pronounced against some New Testament churches help us see what a true New Testament church should be like, what meanings it should convey and what impact it should have.

Thus, the concept of dynamic equivalence churchness enables us to speak of indigeneity on a much more profound level than the older "three-self" definition. To become self-supporting is both easier and less meaningful than to become so involved in the local culture that the functions performed and meanings conveyed by the ongoing life of the church is immediately perceived as relevant by

those inside and outside the church. It is only as churches become dynamically equivalent to New Testament churches that they will turn their world upside-down as the New Testament churches did theirs.

How do we Measure Dynamic Equivalence Churchness?

The Iglesia ni Cristo Case Study

Philippine Church observers have consistently viewed the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as a truly Filipino church whatever else it may be. From its founding it has been completely supported by Philippine money, governed by Filipinos, and propagated by Filipinos. In *The Philippine Church* I said, "If Aglipayanism can be regarded as an attempt at indigenization of Roman Catholicism, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* may be an attempt at indigenization of Protestantism" (1971: 147). By the "three-self" definition of indigeneity the *Iglesia ni Cristo* qualifies as a completely indigenous church, but as an "attempt at indigenization" more needs to be said concerning how well it has actually succeeded.

The accompanying diagram of dynamic equivalence (*Figure 7*) illustrates what we have been discussing and portrays the development of dynamic equivalence churchness as a dynamic process. The diagram itself is based on Kraft's diagram (1973a:56), but it has been revised somewhat to make it better portray the process of actually trying to measure the degree of dynamic equivalence of specific churches. This diagram will serve as the model which will guide the design of the tools (in this case, scales) by which we will attempt to measure the dynamic equivalence of a church.

In attempting to measure the dynamic equivalence of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, we will be using certain scales deve-

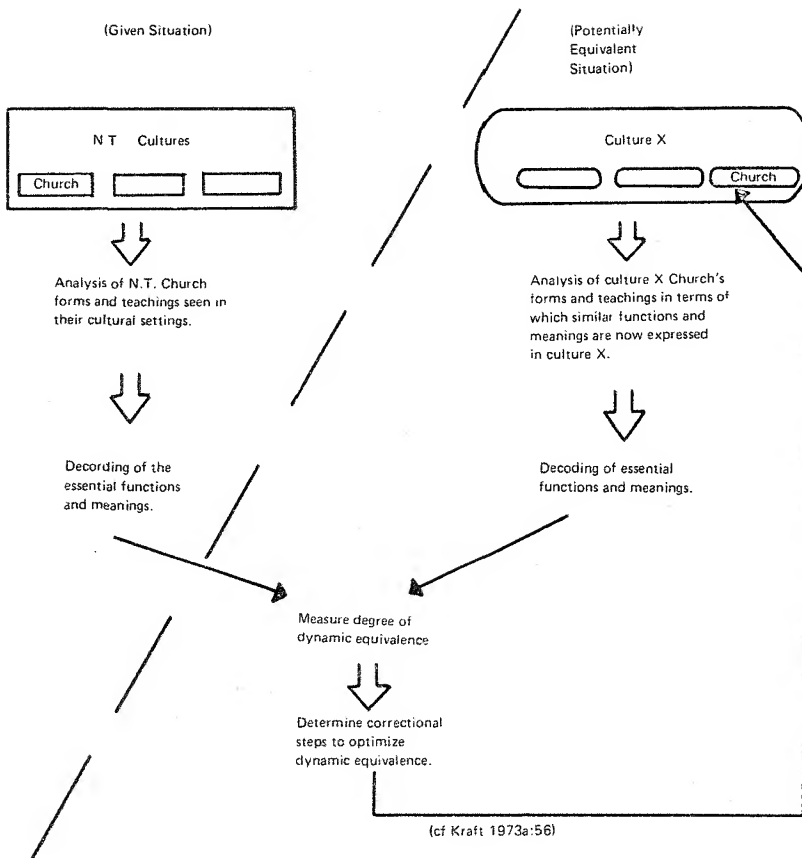


Figure 7: Measuring Dynamic Equivalence Churchness

loped by Kraft on the basis of this model of dynamic equivalence churchness. In the paper in which he developed these scales he points out that "primary attention should be given to the equivalence (or lack of it) between the self and community images of that church and those of the New Testament churches" (1973b:41). To do this we will need to evaluate representative numbers of factors that make up and influence these images. Just as any cultural institution can be analyzed at various levels of complexity, so the corporate life of a church can be visualized as being made up of a series of cultural patterns, each of which is composed of certain complexes, and these complexes in turn are made up of groups of cultural traits. By beginning our analysis on the smallest level, that of traits (singing, prayer, organizational regulations, etc.), we will be less likely to make oversimplifying generalizations, and our analysis will have a higher validity.

Though the analysis was begun at the trait level, the scales in *Figures 8-12* show the conclusions at the pattern level for reasons of both economy of space and clarity of presentation. Thus the pattern of worship covers the traits of singing, corporate and private prayer, use of Scripture, preaching, and ritual. A rather complete listing of the traits and complexes subsumed under the various patterns may be found in Kraft, 1973b:43ff.

Before presenting the results of our analysis, we should note the limitations of our model at its present stage of development. Much more analysis of New Testament Church forms and teachings from this perspective needs to be done. The use of measurement scales presupposes ideal types of both New Testament churches and the cultures surrounding today's churches against which we measure observed church patterns. More research is needed before we can accurately describe these needed ideal

types. The model is useful but lacks precision in its present form. As we apply it to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* we will learn much about the indigeneity of this church, but we will also be left with some unanswered questions. Our use of a yet imprecise model is justified by both the understanding gained through its application and also by the opportunity to contribute to its refinement.

Scale (I Figure 8) seeks to measure the extent of the use of the surrounding society's cultural patterns by the church being measured. We are speaking of the **actual** surrounding society, not an idealized "real Filipino" society. If the society is westernized to some degree, some westernized traits should be expected to be seen. And with reference to the degree of indigeneity of patterns, the key words are "**developed** from within the society," so it is not expected that an indigenous pattern must be adopted without any Christian adaptation or transformation. The assumption underlying this scale is that for a church today to be dynamically equivalent to the New Testament churches, it should reflect the surrounding cultural patterns in the same way that the New Testament churches reflected the patterns of the cultures in which they were immersed.

Figure 8

Measuring Dynamic Equivalence Churchness

Scale I: Extent of Use of Surrounding Cultural Patterns

Patterns	Developed from within the Culture					Borrowed From Outside				
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Worship				X						
Organization			X							
Belief						X				
Witness				X						
Education		X								
Ceremonial			X							
Behavior		X								

We begin our measurement with the worship pattern of the *Iglesia*. On the trait level I observed its music, prayer, use of Scripture, preaching, ritual, and frequency of services.

Music is often a good item on which to focus first when measuring indigeneity because cultural differences in music are often readily identifiable. But even here quick judgments are liable to be inaccurate. Ando, for example, refers to the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* "beautiful hymns using native folk tunes" (1969:336). But we have already seen that England found all of the tunes he heard identifiable western hymn tunes and so he concludes, "I would say the indigeneity index would be quite low" (1974). But because all words of the hymns were original Tagalog compositions and not translated versions of English hymns and because the style of singing I heard in the services was quite Filipino (rather slow and low pitched), I rated its music more towards the indigenous side of the scale (number seven on a ten point scale). I rated the worship pattern seven.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo's* highly centralized form of church government under a charismatic leader fits very well the "cacique" ("big leader") pattern in Filipino culture. So as to organization I rated the *Iglesia* well over to the indigenous side of the scale with an eight.

Its belief system has many important borrowings from the Restoration movement and the Seventh Day Adventists so this, along with the lack of any emphasis on the spirits, moved the rating toward the **Borrowed from the Outside** end of the scale. I rated this five.

I felt that its rather tactless witnessing methods kept the witness pattern from being fully indigenous, though its methods are more Filipino than are those of many Evan-

Its ceremonies are harder to evaluate, but their frequency (e.g., the Lord's Supper and ordination are held only once a year; its worship services are twice weekly), and leadership patterns were definitely developed from within the culture. The members' behavior patterns are definitely high on the indigeneity scale since the average *Iglesia* member is much less westernized than the average Filipino Protestant.

Figure 9

Patterns	Vitality and Relevance	Non-vitality, Irrelevance
1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12
13	14	15
16	17	18
19	20	21
22	23	24
25	26	27
28	29	30
31	32	33
34	35	36
37	38	39
40	41	42
43	44	45
46	47	48
49	50	51
52	53	54
55	56	57
58	59	60
61	62	63
64	65	66
67	68	69
70	71	72
73	74	75
76	77	78
79	80	81
82	83	84
85	86	87
88	89	90
91	92	93
94	95	96
97	98	99
100	101	102
103	104	105
106	107	108
109	110	111
112	113	114
115	116	117
118	119	120
121	122	123
124	125	126
127	128	129
130	131	132
133	134	135
136	137	138
139	140	141
142	143	144
145	146	147
148	149	150
151	152	153
154	155	156
157	158	159
160	161	162
163	164	165
166	167	168
169	170	171
172	173	174
175	176	177
178	179	180
181	182	183
184	185	186
187	188	189
190	191	192
193	194	195
196	197	198
199	200	201
202	203	204
205	206	207
208	209	210
211	212	213
214	215	216
217	218	219
220	221	222
223	224	225
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331	332	333
334	335	336
337	338	339
340	341	342
343	344	345
346	347	348
349	350	351
352	353	354
355	356	357
358	359	360
361	362	363
364	365	366

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Worship		I				O				
Organization		I		O						
Belief	I							O		
Witness	I				O					
Education	I							O		
Ceremonial		I				O				
Behavior				I				O		

In the *Iglesia's* case I feel that the insider's view and the outsider's view would definitely be different. To *Iglesia* members their worship patterns, organization, beliefs, forms of witness, system of leadership, education, and ceremonies would all seem highly vital and relevant. I feel, however, that most *Iglesia* members would not necessarily rate themselves as exceptionally high in Christian living (behavior), in contrast to sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons. Outsiders, on the other hand, would find some of the elements in *Iglesia* services and especially preaching irrelevant. Most Filipino Christians seem to admire *Iglesia* organization and discipline. *Iglesia* ministers are not considered highly educated, and *Iglesia* members are not held up as model Christians, especially in the area of Christian compassion.

In *Scale III (Figure 10)*, "Point of Reference," we are asking, "What is the point of reference in terms of which the church determines its course of action in any particular situation?" Kraft points out that there are three basic possibilities: in-cultural, other-cultural, and supracultural. A Christian church will opt for the supracultural God as its point of reference, but it may conceive of Him as working either through its own culture or in terms of a foreign culture. So a church's point of reference may be quite directly supracultural or it may be supracultural detoured via an outside culture.

Figure 10

Scale III: Point of Reference

[illegible]

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* point of reference for its belief and life is definitely God (thus supracultural) and they definitely do not see God relating to them through any foreign culture.

Scale IV (Figure 11) was not included in Kraft's original set of scales. I added this scale to clarify what we mean when we say that a dynamically equivalent church must not only make use of forms developed from within its own culture, but it must also communicate genuinely Christian meanings and perform authentically Christian functions. When we measure the authenticity of a church's worship pattern we are asking, "Is the true God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ truly worshiped?" We are also asking, "Do the organizational forms actually perform Christian functions?" If, for example, the discipline of the church prevents a church member from interacting with God directly, we would judge that form to be less than authentically Christian. As to belief, is the belief system essentially Christian? Obvious heresy must be judged, whether it is of a "homegrown variety" or imported. We also ask if the forms of witness communicate truly Christian meanings, and if the educational forms transmit Christian meanings. Do the ceremonial forms provide vehicles for Christian meanings or perform Christian functions? Are the behavior patterns those that Christ would approve in that culture? If it is objected that this type of evaluation is very difficult, we will readily admit that it is, but all the same necessary. It is somewhat analogous to a Bible Society expert criticizing a translator for faulty exegesis of the biblical text for failing to understand its meaning.

Figure 11

Scale IV: Christian Authenticity

Patterns	Authentic Christian Meanings							Non-Christian Meanings		
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Worship	I			O						
Organization	I							O		
Belief	I						O			
Witness	I						O			
Education	I				O					
Ceremonial	I			O						
Behavior			I					O		

Does the *Iglesia ni Cristo* communicate authentic Christian meanings and perform authentic Christian functions? To an *Iglesia* member all that the *Iglesia* does and all that it believes are supremely authentic because it is the only true Church in their view. But outsiders will evaluate *Iglesia* patterns differently. Some would not grant that any are authentically Christian. But if we grant degrees of Christian authenticity, the different patterns would surely be rated differently. The worship pattern, for example, would seem to be more authentically Christian than the completely dictatorial organization. The sarcastic bombastic debating style (though not the practice of debating itself—witness Stephen!) would seem to be less Christian than the ceremonial pattern.

The *Summary Scale* (Figure 12) attempts to portray just how dynamically equivalent the church being investigated is to the New Testament Church.

Figure 12

Summary Scale

INC	Dynamic Equivalence					Non-Dynamic Equivalence				
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
	I						O			

How dynamically equivalent is the *Iglesia ni Cristo* to the New Testament Church? According to the summary scale, the evaluation depends on whether you are an *Iglesia* member or not. The *Iglesia* member's view (i.e., its **self-image**) is that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is absolutely dynamically equivalent to the New Testament Church. To the outsider (whether Roman Catholic or Protestant) its **community-image** is that the *Iglesia* falls short, primarily because of heterodox belief, lack of Christian liberty, and lack of evidence of spirituality.

The wide gap between the self and community images should be a source of concern for any church for whom it exists. If the others see it differs so sharply from the way it sees itself, then a searching self-evaluation is in order. Outsiders may be mistaken but the fact that they do not see Christian meanings communicated in a church's life is at least symptomatic of a failure in communication, if not a failure in being a dynamically equivalent church.

We may also draw the conclusion that the tools for measuring dynamic equivalence churchness would tell us more about a church's indigeneity if the church under investigation could be considered as basically orthodox and truly Christian. If the church is heterodox, this fact will tend to obscure the purely cultural factors which are really more in focus when we speak of indigeneity. A church may not be a dynamic equivalent church either for the reason that it remains foreign to the host culture or that it drastically departs from the New Testament model or from a combination of these two factors. Our rather adverse judgment on the *Iglesia ni Cristo* resulted from the second of these factors for it is definitely not foreign to Filipino culture. Possibly two summary scales are needed, one to measure the cultural factors, another to portray the equiv-

alence of religious impact. The value in Kraft's tool lies in the opportunity it affords to consider the different components of the life of a church both in relation to the culture in which it lives and to the archetypical New Testament churches.

CHAPTER 8

ITS METHODS OF PROPAGATION AND RHETORIC

Methods of Propagation

Public Debates

From its inception the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has used religious debates as one of its primary means of winning a public hearing and propagating its teachings. Through the years it has honed its debating skills to a fine edge and has won over many members as a result. True, in recent years the number and frequency of these debates has dropped off dramatically, but whether this has been the result of lack of challengers or change of church policy is not clear. In 1972 I was informed that Eraño Manalo had ordered *Iglesia* ministers to cease holding public debates, but recently I have obtained a tape recording of a debate held on August 27, 1973 so this restriction, if it exists, is not absolute. This latest debate, however, was not held in the open air but in a private residence.

In the past *Iglesia ni Cristo* debates could be quite a "production." To help catch the flavor of a typical debate I will reproduce a first-person account of an actual debate which I witnessed and at which the "opposition debater" was a Filipino co-worker and Baptist pastor, Rogelio Baldemor.

"I Debated with the Iglesia ni Cristo"

I got out of the jeep at the Sariaya town plaza. A crowd was already milling around the basketball court, excitedly waiting for the widely advertised

debate to begin. I saw many jeeps and buses parked near the plaza. These had been chartered by the Iglesia ni Cristo to bring their members from surrounding towns to bolster their "cheering section" during the debate. That evening I was to meet one of this sect's most able debaters to defend the doctrine of the deity of Christ, a doctrine which they vehemently reject.

Why did I accept this challenge to debate? I knew that public debates were one of their chief means of gaining converts, and I also knew the Scriptural injunction that the servant of the Lord must not strive or quarrel. But did not the Apostle Paul himself engage in public debate on occasion to present the Gospel to the masses?

At the time this debate was held we were just beginning a church in Sariaya, about a 15-minute drive from Lucena City where I am the pastor. We had been repeatedly challenged by the Iglesia ni Cristo to defend our doctrine publicly. They charged that we were actually afraid to do so. After much prayer; decided that; must meet them publicly. The Lord assured me that no matter what the provocation He would enable me to remain cool and Christian in my spirit.

I would only agree to what we call an "Oxford-style" debate. Each side would have three stands of 20 minutes each, and after each stand the other side would have five minutes to interrogate the speaker. We agreed that each listener would be his own judge. A neutral moderator and timekeeper (a Roman Catholic and former vice-mayor of the town) also had been agreed upon.

Since this was to be "their show" the Iglesia ni Cristo provided the loud-speaking equipment. I soon noticed that the microphone which they had for me was noticeably weaker than the one their debater was using. Their team consisted of one chief debater and an assistant, both district min-

isters. The assistant was busy checking my Scripture references throughout the debate. Three or four other ministers were also on the platform. I, feeling a little like the prophet Elijah, was the only one on our side of the platform. I was confident of the truth of our position but knew their reputation for unfair tricks.

I began by citing many Scripture verses which teach the deity of Christ. The Iglesia ni Cristo accepts the inspiration of the Scripture, so I bore down heavily on the biblical evidence. I cited Hebrews 1:8 where the Son, that is Christ, is clearly referred to as God. When the debater stood up to interrogate me he very neatly passed over all the clear verses I had mentioned and zeroed in on a verse with exegetical problems.

During his stands the Iglesia ni Cristo debater emphasized that the Bible refers to Jesus as a man, and that Jesus called Himself a man when He was here on earth. I emphasized in turn that I believed Christ was true man as well as true God, so those verses referring to Him as man were no problem to me. But I also pointed out that for every verse he could cite calling Christ a man, I could cite many more which referred to Him as God or God's Son.

The partisan nature of the crowd, especially that part of it close to the platform, soon became obvious. As the Iglesia ni Cristo debater made some of his very familiar points he gradually increased the volume of his voice until he reached a climax of intensity, and then his followers would burst into applause as if it had been rehearsed.

As the evening wore on he became more and more personal in his attacks on me. He tried desperately to make me angry, but I felt an extraordinary calmness and control. So, his tactic failed. I heard later that the local parish priest had remarked that the Iglesia ni Cristo won the debate in insults, but the Baptists won in truth.

During my last stand I did something that they had not expected. I brought out a large blackboard and gave a simple, illustrated exposition of Philippians 2:5-11 which I called "The Three Stages of the Life of Christ"—before His incarnation, when He took human form, and when He was glorified. I stated that we could explain any verse about Christ in the Bible by simply placing it in its proper place in the stages of Christ's existence. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* debater did not answer this presentation, but merely went back to the Scriptures which teach that God is one, and He gives His glory to no one else. I closed the debate by asking him if Christ made a mistake in accepting Thomas' worship in John 20:28,29.

After the debate we sportingly shook hands and then went our separate ways. I have noticed since then that the ordinary ministers of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* will not discuss doctrine with me, because I have faced the top man in this area. (Baldemor, Tuggy, 1972:6,7)

Since the debate, Baldemor has met the *Iglesia* debater on several occasions, each time he was greeted warmly. Once the *Iglesia* minister gave Baldemor a lift in his jeep between towns. Baldemor said to him, "I understand that the *Iglesia* celebrates the Santa Cena ("Lord's Supper") only once a year. Do you have a Scriptural basis for that practice?" The *Iglesia* minister answered, "Yes, we do—but I won't tell you now. Who knows, we may 'play' again." Though the remark was made in jest, it does give some insight into how the *Iglesia* leaders view these debates. The purpose is obviously not to seek the truth but to defend a position and an organization. Still, positive gains accrued to the Evangelical cause in the town of Sariaya as a result of the debate. The Baptist church had new prestige; it had met the past masters in religious debate and had emerged honorably, if not completely unscathed. And

the new relationship between the two debating ministers may give a glimmer of hope that in spite of their bluster, *Iglesia* ministers are human and do respond to personal sincerity and sometimes may even listen to what is said by the other side.

The most recent debate of which I am aware was the Ramos-Tica debate held in a home of a Baptist sympathizer in Manila on August 27, 1973, 7:00 o'clock in the evening. The topic was "*Patunayan na ang kaligtasan ay matatamo sa pamamagitan ng pananampalataya lamang sa Panginoong Jesucristo*" ("Resolved: That salvation can be obtained by faith only in the Lord Jesus Christ"). Defending the proposition was Gavino Tica, a prominent Baptist pastor. The *Iglesia ni Cristo's* General Evangelist, Teofilo Ramos, took the negative stand. Each man had three stands of fifteen minutes each, and after each stand the other man had five minutes to interrogate the speaker before launching into his following presentation. Tica had the first stand and began by explaining man's need for salvation and then showed that, according to the Bible, man could receive eternal life or salvation through believing in Jesus Christ. But not every type of faith is saving faith, Tica made clear. It had to be genuine faith—a faith that works (Galatians 5:6). He ended his first stand with a personal testimony of how he found peace, satisfaction, and forgiveness of sin by believing in Christ.

For his interrogation of the speaker, Ramos asked Tica if in any of the verses he had read, the words "salvation can be obtained by faith alone" could be found. Tica answered that the thought was there but not these exact words. Then Ramos began his stand by noting that the reason why he was against the stated proposition was not that he was against believing in Christ, but that the proposition as stated was contrary to the plain statements of

the Scriptures. He directed the audience's attention to James 2:24 (which he read first in Tagalog, then in four different English versions): "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and **not by faith only.**" Ramos then said that the Bible taught that besides believing in Christ, a person must also believe in God. Did not Jesus himself say, "Believe in God, believe **also** in me?" (John 14:1). . . . And so the debate proceeded, both sides ending up by charging that the other had added or subtracted words from the text of Scripture, thus each side was able to pronounce the imprecations of Revelation 22:18,19 on the other.

A first reaction to this debate might be a suggestion that next time the subject should be chosen so as to put the burden of proof on the *Iglesia*. For example, "Resolved: That salvation can be obtained only through joining the *Iglesia ni Cristo*." But it is doubtful whether the *Iglesia* would actually accept this subject, although this was exactly Ramos' position in his last stand in the above debate. If, however, the *Iglesia* did refuse to debate on such a subject, this in itself might provide an opening for more sincere in-depth discussion of crucial issues between *Iglesia* leaders and Evangelicals.

Undeniably, Filipino audiences enjoy such sharp, hard-hitting public debates as we have described above. Political rallies, for example, have been called (in pre-martial law times!) the number one Philippine spectator sport. Mary Hollnsteiner, a noted Philippine sociologist, describes the interest of even little children in such outdoor meetings.

Even very young children attend political rallies, listening attentively to the speakers late into the night and glorying in violent attacks and heated arguments. Small wonder that when they grow up this love for engaging in political intrigues persists. (1963:116)

Many older Evangelical leaders were converted by Protestants debating Roman Catholics. Bishop Sobrepeña was one notable instance. And we have already seen that Felix Manalo began his religious pilgrimage after hearing a Protestant missionary defeat a Roman Catholic priest in debate.

What has public debating done for the *Iglesia ni Cristo*? For one thing, it has forced the *Iglesia* and its teachings on the consciousness of millions of Filipinos in every part of the archipelago. It has forced *Iglesia* leaders to study the Bible in great detail, at least on certain points. It, undoubtedly, has helped the *Iglesia* sharpen its own doctrinal formulation, especially in the Tagalog language (where some other Filipino churches have been weak), and taught it much about communicating with the Filipino masses. They have found which lines of argument strike home and which do not. The *Iglesia's* question and "Scripture answer" teaching method has been forged through many years of debating experience. Public debating has given the *Iglesia* many members as its debaters emerged victorious in many contests. It has also served as a powerful belief-reinforcing mechanism for *Iglesia* members as they see their leaders "demolish" the opposition.

Iglesia debates have had their negative aspects, however. In recent years, they have even become counterproductive to some extent. One reason is that the debates have become repetitive and very predictable in content. The *Iglesia* has polished certain lines of reasoning and these are repeated time after time—and their impact decreases. Even the sharp, sarcastic jabs lose their edge when repeated over and over again. For perceptive observers who see that the real issues are constantly being skirted, and that the play is always for the grandstands, *Iglesia* debates have become frustrating experiences. The grating

callousness of *Iglesia ni Cristo* ministers sometimes produces a strong counter-reaction. A few years ago in San Pablo City a series of outdoor meetings was held in which the discussions went on until two or three o'clock in the morning with powerful loudspeakers operating at peak volume. This practice is not unknown during the political campaign seasons, but in this case, the public strongly reacted against the *Iglesia*. People began to complain to the city officials that they wanted to get some sleep.

Debating has also given the *Iglesia* a very competitive image which has been reinforced by the *Iglesia* members' "cheering section" psychology. For a political party this would be a definite strength. For a church it is both a strength and a problem. Truth is always in competition with error, but rudely aggressive methods of defending the truth often negate the very truth that is being defended.

Who are mainly attracted by this debating approach? Is it just the fringe of society? Apparently, it has been effective in gaining converts from at least three groups of people. First, many of the Filipino masses who feel "dispossessed" by the all-pervasive Roman Catholic Church have been moved by the powerful attacks on that church. Anticlericalism is not as strong in the Philippines as it is in some countries, such as Mexico, but it is present. Then there is a group of men who greatly enjoy the rough and tumble of politics. Some of these are attracted by the *Iglesia* approach. Cipriano Sandoval related that he first became interested in the *Iglesia* when he saw one of their street meetings and mistook it for a political rally. When he joined the crowd the speakers captured his interest and he attended night after night until he was converted. A third group is made up of a rather large number of nominal, untaught Protestants who are in search of religious certainty. These may be impressed by such *Iglesia* state-

ments as "The Catholics preach their dogmas, the Protestants preach their opinions (*haka-haka* in Tagalog), but we preach the Bible!"

There are no neutrals at *Iglesia ni Cristo* debates and rallies. I have observed the crowds. I have heard the clapping and the shouts of the rabid supporters. I have also seen the clenched fists of those who were violently disagreeing with what was being said. Everyone was involved. No one was uninterested. The *Iglesia* appeals for a verdict. An *Iglesia* debate is never an academic exercise—even when it is conducted in "Oxford style." The *Iglesia* has a verdict theology of mission.

Open Forums and House Meetings

The *Iglesia* does not confine its propaganda efforts to outdoor meetings. It also makes good use of its attractive chapels for this purpose. Especially designed meetings called "open forums" are held on selected evenings which non-members are urged to attend. At these meetings a minister gives a lesson on some *Iglesia* doctrine, and then questions from the floor are answered.

This type of meeting is not limited to the chapels. A minister with a team of deacons and young men may go to a home in a certain district of town or in a barrio to hold a semi-public meeting. The format of these meetings is very similar to that of an open forum. The minister will be sure to bring along his Bible and also the "references"—history books, encyclopedias, books by Catholic authors, and even English Bible versions. These meetings are called "*pagpoppropaganda*" ("propagandizing") and are to be distinguished from the instruction classes for new converts which are referred to as "*pagdodoktrina*" ("indoctrination") and are the subject of the next section.

The importance of these meetings can be seen in the fact that common members are not considered capable of explaining *Iglesia* teachings to outsiders. Only authorized *Iglesia* leaders are permitted to teach the Bible and doctrine. The members' responsibility is to see to it that their contacts attend these meetings, but it is the leaders' responsibility to teach them. Those who insist that lay or every member-witness is the only possible means for rapid church growth need to study *Iglesia* methodology. The *Iglesia* shows that every member mobilization is not necessarily the same as every member-witness.

Indoctrination Classes for Prospective Members

When a person presents himself to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* for baptism or when he wants serious instruction in the church's doctrine, the *Iglesia* now requires him to enroll in a thirty lesson indoctrination course. He may come to the local chapel for this instruction or an *Iglesia* minister or deacon (or deaconess) may go to his home to instruct him.

A Christian and Missionary Alliance missionary, Joseph Arthur, along with Wilmore Marquez, a Filipino co-worker, enrolled in such a course. The course was taught in the large Zamboanga local *Iglesia ni Cristo* chapel (located right next door to the much older Alliance church). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* teachers were the provincial minister, Angeles, assisted by Esteban Bautista, a minister of the Zamboanga local. Arthur and Marquez came to the chapel twice a week at 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon for a one hour instruction period, so they covered the thirty lessons in fifteen weeks. They were told that this same course was being taught to others in their own homes, sometimes by a minister, sometimes by a deacon or deaconess. The minister teaching them would sometimes men-

tion in passing the names of others in town particularly well-known people or Americans who were also undergoing instruction. Arthur and Marquez assume that their names were probably being mentioned to others also.

These indoctrination lessons followed the familiar *Iglesia* question and "Scripture answer" format that we have met so often. The ministers set down a very strict procedural rule that while the lesson was being taught **no** interruption or questions were permitted. Only after the lesson had been completed could questions concerning the lesson be raised for about five or ten minutes. Following is a sampling of the topics covered in this indoctrination course.

"The True God"

"What is that Body, or the True Church, or the name of that body?"

"The Nature of Jesus Christ"

"The Apostate Church"

"The Foundation of the True Church, and the Establishment of the True Church in the Philippines"

"How to Believe in Jesus Christ"

"Who is the Holy Spirit?"

"Who are the 144,000?"

"How to worship God"

"Will the Heathen Be Lost?"

"Sin and the Importance of Baptism"

Various lessons on Prophecy

Authorities other than the Bible were used to substantiate *Iglesia* teachings, including a **World History**, an encyclopedia printed by the United States Air Force, Ellen G. White's (Seventh Day Adventist) **The Great Controversy**, and a book by Rev. Albert Sanders, a veteran Presbyterian missionary.

The ministers avoided certain topics, particularly about what would be their duties after becoming members, espe-

cially regarding finances. Arthur also questioned them about baptism. He had heard from three former *Iglesia* members that they had each had a "vision" at the time of their baptism. The ministers refused to discuss this matter, saying simply that they would find out about it when they would experience baptism. They were given a guided tour of the chapel after completing the course. Earlier, before they took the course, the ministers had refused to show them around the building. They noticed that the baptismal tank was in a small private room, so that the baptismal ceremonies were obviously not public affairs in contrast to the practice of most churches.

After completing the course Arthur invited the ministers to his home for dinner and conversation. After dinner a long conversation ensued revolving around the subjects of authority and hermeneutics. Though the discussion was warm, they parted friends but agreed to enter into no further dialogue.

Arthur reports that the ministers applied no pressure for baptism at the end of the course. I find it hard to believe that their ordinary procedure would be this "take it or leave it" conclusion. This may rather reflect the fact that the ministers were aware of the fact that Arthur and his companion were simply "spying out the land" and not seriously preparing for membership.

Its Rhetoric

In discussing methods of propagation we may become so engrossed with the external mechanics that we overlook the inner logic of persuasion that is actually operating. When people decide to become *Iglesia* members, they have been persuaded to adopt a new belief system. How does the *Iglesia* persuade them? What is its rhetoric by which it

seeks to move men? What are the positive and negative characteristics of its method of argumentation? We have given several specific examples of *Iglesia* public presentations of its position in sermon and debate. Now we are asking, "What are the rhetorical principles underlying these attempts to persuade men to accept its message?"

From our study of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* we can make the following generalizations about the positive characteristics of its rhetoric.

1. It appeals to a widely accepted standard of authority. It uses the Bible which is recognized by most Filipinos as having divine authority.

2. It has sought to construct an internally consistent, tightly logical system of doctrine. *Iglesia* doctrine may not be deep nor wide-ranging, but it is carefully thought through and is logical, if you grant the *Iglesia's* basic pre-suppositions.

3. It does not try to fight battles on too many fronts at once. It has only a few basic themes which are repeated over and over again.

4. Its arguments are well-honed and are readjusted to meet new attacks.

5. It always speaks from a position of strength. It is the "true Church," so all other churches must (according to its logic) defend their right to exist.

The *Iglesia's* rhetoric also shows some negative characteristics which need to be noted.

1. It is based upon faulty hermeneutical principles. It uses both the Scriptures and its "references" out of context and not according to the intent of the original authors.

2. It depends on a superficial logic. "Sharpness" is valued over truth.

3. *Argumentum ad hominem* is frequently resorted to. The opponent's person is attacked, not merely his position.

4. Its use of sarcasm verges on superciliousness, so is often less than convincing.

5. It never deals with the strengths of opposing viewpoints, only their weaknesses.

6. It focuses attention on the organization, not on the teaching.

Among the various Filipino peoples, the Tagalogs have been known throughout their history as the orators of the nation. Felix Manalo was a Tagalog, and his oratory lies at the heart of *Iglesia* rhetoric, for rhetoric is fundamentally the art of oratory. According to some standards of oratory, *Iglesia* rhetoric leaves much to be desired. *Iglesia* debaters do not strive for elegance or even appropriateness, though they give the appearance of aiming for clarity and correctness. But if the aim of oratory is to instruct, to move, and to delight, *Iglesia* orators (for their Filipino audiences) do quite well (especially if "to delight" is interpreted to mean "to entertain"). They would surely agree that their aim is "to move". . . to move people into the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

Principles of Propagation

An important emphasis in this study has been that in spite of the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* heterodox nature, Evangelical churches can learn much from its successful propagation methodologies. However, we need to be forewarned that what one church finds successful in one historico-cultural context may not prove successful, or even workable, in another. Methodology, being heavily conditioned by the

environment in which it is applied, is not always easily transferable to new situations. But the basic principles of propagation which underlie the different methodologies which may be used are of more universal application. Church leaders and missionaries will perceive these principles to be immediately relevant in many situations around the world.

In this section we will discuss the three most important principles of propagation which have guided the *Iglesia* as it has expanded throughout the islands. The first is the principle of **extensive** propagation. The second is the complementary principle of **intensive** propagation. And the third is the principle of **total mobilization** of the church for propagation.

The Principle of Extensive Propagation

Inherent in the concept of propagation (and, therefore, evangelism) is the idea of extension. How can a faith be propagated if it is not extended into new areas? Yet not all churches have consciously adopted this principle. Tragically, some have even practiced its opposite. In my book, *The Philippine Church*, I tell of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society's formal adoption in 1913 of the "Intensive Policy" in their Philippine mission in which they declared that they would not expand into any new area until the then occupied areas had been more thoroughly "worked," and explicitly stated that they needed no more reinforcements for their evangelistic force for a period of five years (Tuggy, 1971:112ff). The "intensive" principle is not bad in itself, as we shall see in the next section, but it is dangerous when it is adopted to the **exclusion** of the extensive principle. The intensive policy, as practiced by the Baptists, resulted in a serious plateauing of growth for the next ten years.

In contrast, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* grew steadily throughout its history by entering one province after another, rather slowly at first, but with an increasing tempo until, as we have already seen, it had entered almost all of the provinces in the Philippines by the mid-1950's. By adopting a nation-wide strategy the *Iglesia* had no built-in limitation on its growth. In doing this it exhibited a primary characteristic of rapidly growing Filipino churches (cf. Tuggy, Toliver, 1972:83). Of course, it is easier for a church which refuses comity agreements, believes it is the true Church, or which has a very distinctive message (such as a Pentecostal denomination), to adopt such a nation-wide policy.

This principle of extensive propagation does not only refer to a nation-wide or world-wide vision. It also applies to the local level. When the *Iglesia* began a local congregation in a town in the Philippines, it was not satisfied with just having entered that town. It immediately sought to propagate itself in every district and every barrio of the town. And not only did it seek to extend itself into every part of the town geographically but also sought to penetrate the various strata of society within the town. This last emphasis is a rather recent one and can best be seen in the activities of the **KMP** and **Buklod** which we described in the previous chapter. This recent penetration of youth and the higher classes should be seen as simply another application of the fundamental principle of extension.

Great church growth presupposes a whole-hearted commitment to the principle of extension. This is really what the Great Commission commands.

Intensive Propagation

Home Bible studies was an evangelistic method that I often used in the Philippines. I usually scheduled these studies once a week in a given home. I remember my sur-

prise when I found out that *Iglesia* workers will go to a home every night, if possible, to instruct the family in its teachings. How can the workers give this much time to this work? It appears to be a matter of priorities. While other churches' workers go to special programs, committee meetings, and become involved in time-consuming community projects, the *Iglesia* ministers and deacons are busy propagating their faith. They have found the value of intensive propagation.

Iglesia converts are literally inundated with personal attention. Their time is so monopolized by the *Iglesia* that competing options fade into the background. In its teaching methods the *Iglesia* has also discovered the strategic value of constant repetition of key doctrines. "Overlearning" or saturation teaching imbeds *Iglesia* teaching in the minds of its converts. *Iglesia* members, as we have seen, are intensively indoctrinated so they know what they believe and why.

Evangelicals shy away from any idea of brain-washing (which is an extreme application of the intensive principle), and they should since it treats the individual as an object and so demeans the human personality. They would insist that the principle of intensive propagation be purged from any mind-manipulative overtones. But the basic validity of the intensive principle persists. New Testament discipleship scarcely can be described as a "Monday night" affair. Missionaries and ministers need to reevaluate seriously their use of time and be prepared to spend much time with new believers. So many things are competing for the new Christian's attention that they must be saturated with God's Word — and quickly! Spiritually effective disciple-making cannot be done in a haphazard undisciplined way. To borrow a valuable modern medical term, new converts need "intensive care."

Mobilization for Propagation

As we have surveyed *Iglesia* history and analyzed its organization we have repeatedly noted that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is completely mobilized for propagation. This brings into focus a principle of propagation which the late Kenneth Strachan formulated into a theorem which became the foundational principle of the "Evangelism-in-Depth" movement. The Strachan theorem states:

The expansion of any movement is in direct proportion to its success in mobilizing its total membership in continuous propagation of its beliefs. This alone is the key. (Strachan 1968:108)

When Evangelism-in-Depth campaigns in Latin America did not produce the measurable church growth that its cooperating churches and missions had hoped for, missiologists began to examine its strategy more critically. Both Peters (1970:83-84) and Wagner (1971:148-153) pointed out that "total mobilization" could only be one component of a successful evangelistic strategy and, possibly, not the most important one at that. Peters particularly suggested that "the dynamic concepts of 'relevance of message' and 'cultural adaptation' be added to the concept of 'total mobilization' as guiding principles" for evangelistic strategy (1970:83). Our research on the *Iglesia ni Cristo* would surely reinforce this advice. As Wagner has pointed out church growth researches around the world, though not denying the importance of mobilization, would certainly eliminate the statement, "This alone is the key" (1971:151).

Having made these qualifying remarks about the importance of the concept of total mobilization, I believe that the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* experience does prove that mobilization has been a critical factor, though not the only one, in its growth. Indeed, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* case may prove

particularly instructive in pointing up the fact that it is not mobilization for just anything or for any purpose that will prove effective for church growth. A church may be mobilized for social action or for prayer, for example, and still not grow. What we have in the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is a particular type of mobilization for a definite purpose—the purpose of propagation. The *Iglesia* does not say, for example, “every member is an evangelist.” But what it does say is that every member must be tied very closely into the church organization so that it can move forward as a unit. Every member has a task, and these tasks are clearly defined. The minister, not the common member, bears the primary responsibility for propagating the faith.

This emphasis upon the minister runs counter to much current thinking on the Church as the Body of Christ and may indeed not be completely in harmony with Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 4:11-13 where pastors and teachers are to build up the believers so that they can do the work of the ministry. However, if Paul’s teaching is taken to mean that those in leadership positions in the church have no responsibility to become personally involved in the propagation of the faith, that this is to be left to the “troops”—if this is the meaning put on Paul’s words—the *Iglesia’s* principle of ministerial leadership in propagation may be a healthy corrective to a misreading of Paul’s teaching. Modern western Christians are more comfortable with the body analogy of the Church than with the military analogy and, probably, for good biblical and historical reasons. However, the Bible does use military language to describe the Christian life (in Ephesians 6, for example), and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* shows the effectiveness of a military type of church organization. The comparison is easy to draw: the local committee would correspond to a squad, the local congregation to a company, and so on. Mobilization is an

important principle, and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* proves that when joined with other factors it will produce church growth.

Results: The Iglesia ni Cristo Graph of Growth

A Church's graph of growth where total communicant membership is plotted against time measures the church's effectiveness in gaining new members and conserving its older members. Its effectiveness is primarily determined by three factors: the fruitfulness of its propagation efforts, the strength of the tie by which it binds its members together, and the receptivity of the target population. In this chapter we have been analyzing the *Iglesia ni Cristo*'s propagation principles and methodology, and we now want to portray the results of its efforts by constructing its graph of growth.

To accurately construct the graph of growth we need accurate membership statistics, preferably, year by year. Unfortunately these are not released by the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, though it, undoubtedly, has them. However, in chapters three and four we attempted to make some careful estimates of *Iglesia* statistics from its beginning to 1970 (see pages 59,68,79 and the graph on page 99 for these statistics). The statistics for 1948, 1960 and 1970 are based upon the official census figures. In the 1970 census *Iglesia ni Cristo* members numbered 475,407. Since this is a census, not a communicant member figure, we should decrease it by 30 percent to give an approximate communicant membership in 1970 of about 330,000. Projecting this to 1975 yields *Iglesia ni Cristo* communicant membership of about 400,000.

The two accompanying graphs (*Figures 13 and 14*) are two different representations of the same statistics of

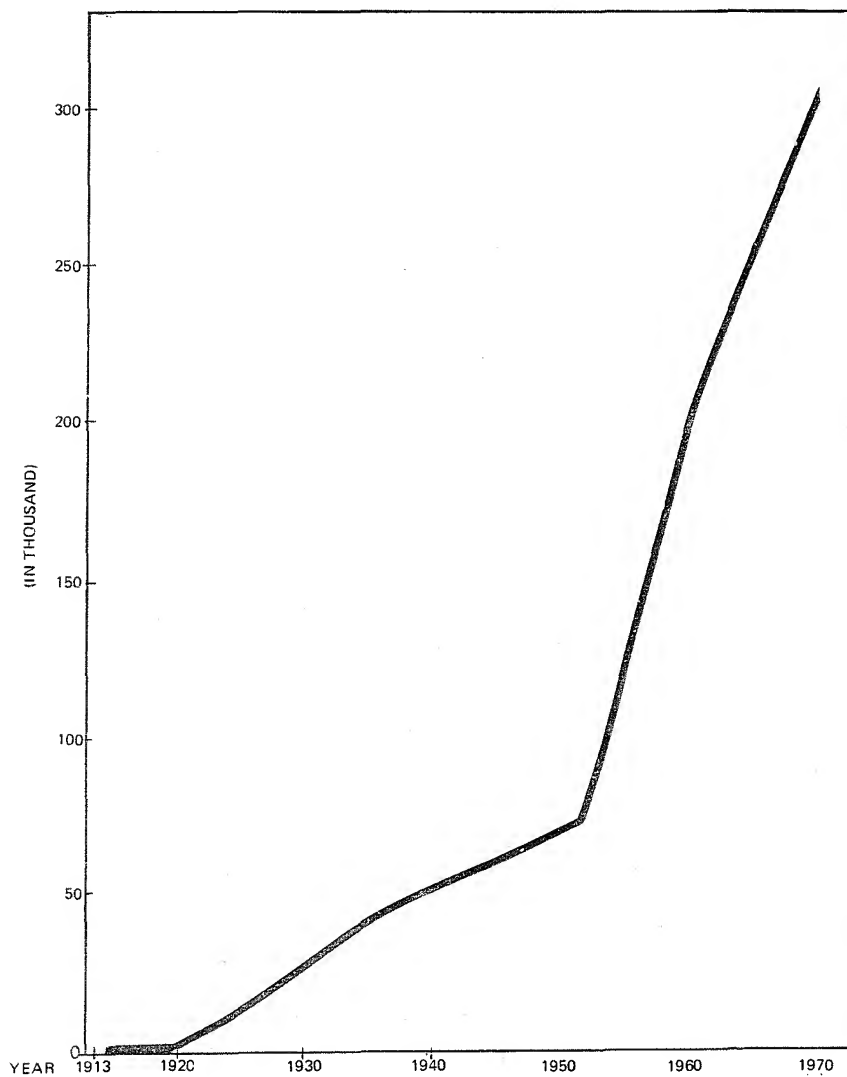


Figure 13: Iglesia ni Cristo Graph of Growth (Absolute)

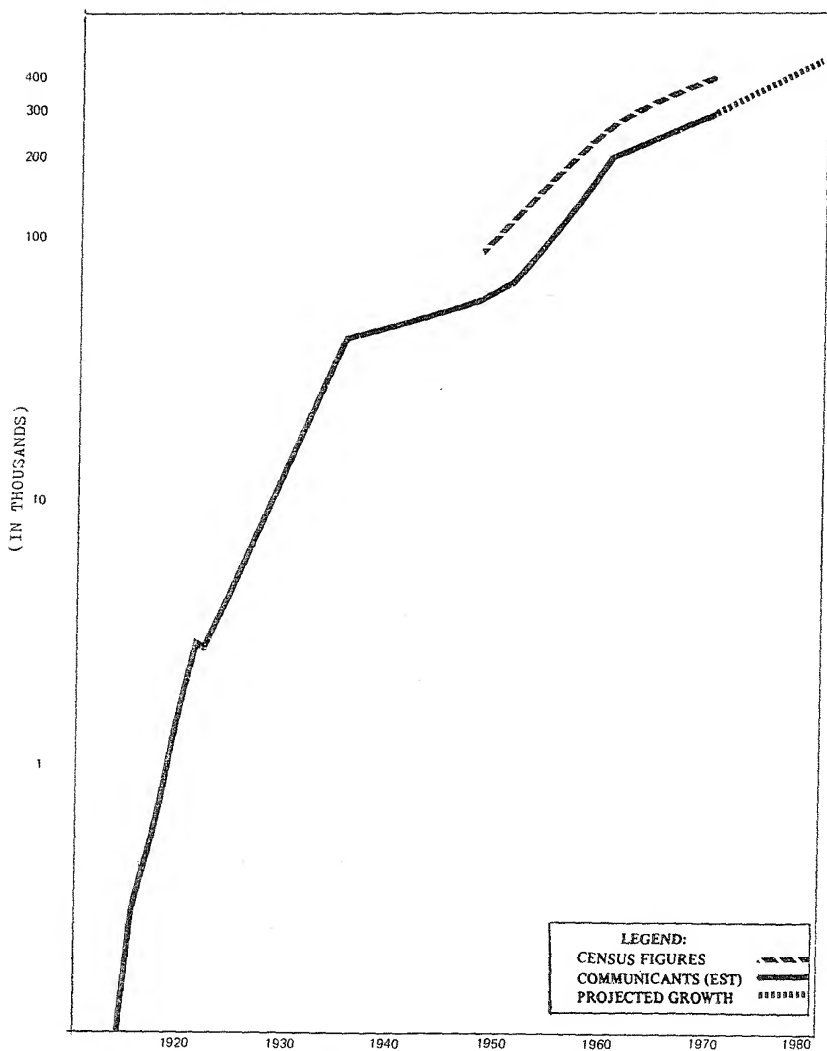


Figure 14: Iglesia ni Cristo Graph of Growth (Logarithmic)

Iglesia ni Cristo growth. The first is drawn on a standard arithmetic scale while the second is constructed on a special four-cycle logarithmic scale. Each representation illustrates certain special characteristics of church growth. The first (standard graph) shows the quantitative growth in absolute numbers. It shows that the *Iglesia* was a rather small, quite insignificant church for at least the first decade of its existence. Then with a solid membership base it grew into a very large church, especially after the Second World War. This first graph has the advantage of clearly portraying the various stages of *Iglesia* growth which we described on pages 88ff.

When the growth history of the *Iglesia* is traced on the logarithmic graph (*Figure 13*) a different perspective is gained. Logarithmic graphs distort the absolute quantitative growth to give a time picture of the changes in the rate of growth. The steeper the positive slope of the line, the faster the church is growing. A negative (downward) slope would indicate the rate of decrease, but negative growth has not been an *Iglesia* problem (except during the 1922 Ora rebellion).

The difference of perspective between the two systems of graphing is most dramatically shown in the very early period of *Iglesia* history, between 1914 and 1922. Whereas, in the standard graph this shows as a period of little (quantitative) growth, it was actually the period of the *Iglesia's* most rapid (percentage) growth. (This, however, may be somewhat misleading since a very small church can experience a high percentage growth rate more easily than a large church because the calculations are made on such a small numerical base in the case of a small church. A church of only ten members growing to twenty, for example, has already experienced 100 percent growth.) And although

the rate of growth during the 1950's was very healthy (over 200 percent!), it was less than during the first twenty years of *Iglesia* history. The more drastic slowdown in growth rate in the 1960's is easily seen in the logarithmic graph, though it is completely obscured in the standard graph. This is an important observation because a drop from 200 percent to 76 percent per decade in growth rate is a significant slowdown, marking a transition from rapid growth to consolidation as noted in chapter 4. Logarithmic graphs are also useful to project future growth. By laying a ruler along the line between 1960 and 1970 and extending the line we can project *Iglesia* future growth, assuming that it will grow at approximately the same rate that it did during the 1960-1970 period. If faster growth is projected the ruler should be tipped more steeply. If a slowdown is expected the ruler should be tipped at a lower angle. If the *Iglesia* continues to grow at its 1960-1970 rate it should reach a half a million communicant members by 1980.

Throughout its sixty years of existence the *Iglesia* has shown an enviable record of growth. The point of this chapter has been that this growth was not an accident but resulted from an effective propagation strategy based upon sound and energetically implemented principles. Other churches which desire to grow in the Philippines must follow the same road.

CHAPTER 9

ITS SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS WITH OTHER THIRD WORLD INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

The World-wide Independent Church Phenomenon

Classifying Churches: From Troeltsch to Barrett

To classify a social phenomenon, of course, is not necessarily to understand it. But to classify it meaningfully will aid our understanding of it as we conceptually relate it to other similar phenomena. We have carefully studied the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* history, examined its teachings, and analyzed its life and methods of propagation. Based on these lines of research, what way of classifying it most helps understanding? Shall we simply dismiss it as an anti-Christian sect, as many Christians in the Philippines do? Shall we try to analyze it in terms of Troeltsch's church-sect dichotomy (in which "sect" no longer has a derogatory connotation but simply describes a sociological type)? Or shall we classify it according to Yinger's refinement of Troeltsch's typology on a church-denomination-sect-cult axis (cf. Yinger, 1970:256ff)? Or, finally, should we opt for Barrett's mission church-independent church typology?

In this study we have, for two reasons, chosen to use Barrett's typology. First, Barrett's work has a definite Third World orientation being based on a detailed analysis of the African church situation. And second, by applying it to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* we can both extend its usefulness as a tool and point up the *Iglesia's* significance on the world Church scene. However, to show clearly that we are indeed describing a world-wide phenomenon and not just

an African or even a purely Third World phenomenon, we need to see that Barrett's typology is actually a special application of Troeltsch's church-sect typology.

Students of sociology of religion have pointed out that Troeltsch's pioneering study contrasting the sect-type of religious organization with the church-type (1931:331-382) was somewhat limited in perspective by the fact that it focused on the state churches of Europe. His dichotomy is inadequate when it comes to explaining religious phenomena in religiously pluralistic societies, such as that of the United States, when the denomination becomes an important type. Yet even here, Troeltsch's analysis retains its basic validity and has great value in understanding the dynamics of the sects which are seen as voluntary, disciplined, minority religious groupings, often beginning in the lower classes with a charismatic leader, in contrast with the universalistic, institutionalized State churches (1931:338-339). Where Troeltsch sees sects arising as reactions to the church, Barrett describes African independent churches arising as reactions to mission (1968:270ff). They both are describing similar sociological phenomena, the main differences being in the historical and cultural contexts in which they occur. Since the context in which Barrett is making his study is mission lands (in Africa), we will find his typology more immediately useful than Troeltsch's, but we should understand that the phenomenon which Barrett is describing is part of a world-wide phenomenon which was first definitively dealt with by Troeltsch.

A defect of Troeltsch's scheme is that because he belonged to the State church he chose a derogatory word to indicate break away churches. That he uses it 'in no derogatory sense' does not affect the fact that it had then and has now a disparaging sense. It is noteworthy that even

today in pluralistic United States, speakers are likely to refer to denominations lower in the social and economic scale than their own as "sects". Barrett, on the contrary, in his classificatory system calls both types of religious bodies, churches—*independent churches* and *mission churches*.

Barrett's thesis is that the independent church is an Africa-wide phenomenon, and its significance lies in that fact. It is our thesis that it is more than Africa-wide—it is world-wide. Alan Swanson in his book on independent churches in Taiwan calls it a "global phenomenon" (1970: 16). Identifying Barrett's mission church-independent church typology as a special case of Troeltsch's church-sect dichotomy enables us to see its world-wide significance and will help us see such phenomena as the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in a new perspective.

Generalizing Barrett

Barrett based his analysis on a broad survey of Christian independency in thirty-four African nations. Seeing these over five thousand multi-form movements as basically different expressions of the same phenomenon, he designed a statistical procedure to determine the significant common elements in these varied movements. He examined these common elements to discover the causative factors which led to the rise and multiplication of the independent churches. Barrett's concept of tribal "Zeitgeist" became the foundational element in his analysis. He defined *Zeitgeist* as "the socio-religious climate of opinion favoring independency, protest or renewal in a given tribe at a given time" (1968:110). *Zeitgeist* is synonymous with "religious tension" in Barrett's usage. Since the latter is the better term I will use it in our discussion (the term "*Zeitgeist*")

may carry some Hegelian or Durkheimian overtones and be taken to mean that each tribe or people has its own "spirit ["geist"] which has an objective existence of its own). Barrett sees tribal religious tension as the key factor (though not the only factor) in the rise of independent churches within the various African nations today.

On the basis of his empirical findings, Barrett lists eighteen factors relating to traditional culture, traditional religion, colonial history, mission history, and the contemporary situation which he found correlated with the occurrence of independency within a tribe (1968:109). With a scale built on these factors he measures the religious tension of a given tribe and determines the strength of the movement toward independency within that particular tribe. For example, if five or less of these factors are present, the movement toward independency is said to be "dormant" within that particular tribe and independency is not likely to occur. On the other hand, if thirteen or more factors are present independency is inevitable.

Here the relevancy of Barrett's analysis to our study of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the Philippines becomes apparent. If these eighteen factors measuring tribal religious tension can be extended to cover non-African cases, we can show that the phenomenon of independency is not only Africa-wide but may occur in any mission land that has ever been under western colonial rule. To generalize in this way of necessity will be at the expense of some preciseness because we are not working inductively from a great mass of data as Barrett was when he developed his tool. However, the broader application will, at least in part, compensate for the lack of precision.

We first need to generalize Barrett's analysis at the fundamental point of using the tribe as the basic social

unit. In doing this we are not challenging his finding that "independency is primarily a tribal phenomenon" (1968: 58)—in Africa. We are saying, however, that the important factor in this assertion is the people-consciousness of African tribes, along with the fact that these tribes have been subject to colonial powers sometime in their histories. Among peoples of other countries, such as the Philippines, nationalistic feelings may now be stronger than tribal loyalties so that their people-consciousness is now focused more on their being Filipinos than being, say, Tagalogs. And Filipinos, as a people, have experienced colonial rule, first under Spain, then under the United States. The social dynamics are similar enough to justify generalizing in the way we are suggesting. We can do this by stating that independency (the rise of independent, non-mission related churches) occurs among peoples which have a strong people-consciousness and which have experienced colonial rule sometime in their history.

In extending and applying to non-tribal populations the factors which lead to the increase of religious tension among a people and which increase the probability that independency will occur, instead of asking such questions as, "Is the ancestor cult important?" or "Is there an earth goddess?" we would ask, "Do the fundamental themes of the people's traditional religion still persist in their present belief system?" Questions concerning former colonial rule are still quite relevant in countries such as the Philippines. The publication of the Scriptures in the vernacular appears to be just as significant a factor in the Philippine situation as it is in Africa. Barrett also found a high correlation between "missionary density" (number of ordained missionaries per million according to Barrett's usage but, possibly, better defined in terms of number of ordained missionaries per thousand communicant members) and the

presence of independency. This would also be a significant factor in the Philippines. Related to the question of missionary density would be the question of variety—are several missions of differing denominational distinctives planting churches among these people in close proximity to each other? (The fact that Felix Manalo was able to join several different Protestant churches before beginning his own would indicate the importance of this factor.)

Based upon the above discussion, I have composed and offer a set of questions which could be used to measure the religious tension, and, by extension, the probability of the occurrence of independency among peoples living outside the African continent.

Table 3

Tentative Scale of Religious Tension

1. Is this a people with a strong sense of people-consciousness or nationalistic feelings?
2. Does it number more than 100,000 population (or large enough to support an independent movement)?
3. Has this people been under colonial rule in its history?
4. Do the fundamental themes of its traditional religion (e.g., beliefs in spirits, ghosts, etc.) still persist in its belief system?
5. Has the vernacular New Testament or Bible been published?
6. Has the Protestant missionary density in the nation been more than one ordained missionary per 1,000 communicant members for some years (decades)?
7. Has more than one Protestant mission with differing denominational distinctives planted churches among this people?

It would seem that if five or more of these factors are present an independent church is highly likely to occur within that people. However, Barrett also points out that more than a high level of religious tension is necessary for a "successful secession." He lists six preconditions: a high level of religious tension, a charismatic leader, an intolerable situation, a fairly large initial exodus of adherents, continued hostility from the parent body, but a minimum of governmental interference. Five of these six seem to have been present at the time that Felix Manalo founded the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Only the large initial exodus of adherents seems to have been lacking, but Manalo did have a dedicated core of former members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as we have seen in chapter three.

Other factors may be present which would also contribute to the emergence of independent churches which were not included in Barrett's scale. What place do socio-economic factors play in this phenomenon? Ando sees these as very important in the growth (though not necessarily in the founding) of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* (1969). What effect does the social structure of the tribe or people have on the occurrence of independent churches? Do they more frequently occur among peoples whose society is more fragmented? These questions point to the need for further research on the world-wide independent church phenomenon so that its dynamics may be more accurately known. Barrett believes that independency will continue to be a major force in church life in Africa for many years to come. It is likely to become increasingly important in other areas of the world as well. To remain ignorant of this phenomenon or to ignore it would be a serious blunder for the older churches. Accurate information and careful analysis is needed as we chart our way in this increasingly complex situation.

Our concern in this first part of this chapter has been to establish the world-wide nature of the independent church phenomenon. We have stressed that we are dealing with movements which have arisen from similar causes and have similar dynamics. But having made the point that independent churches reflect certain common sociological and religious mechanisms, we must also emphasize that they are as different as they are similar. No "cookie-cutter" sameness appears among these churches. To make this point more concrete and meaningful, we shall describe both the ways that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is similar and also the ways in which it differs from other major Third World independent churches. To give our comparisons more breadth we will compare the *Iglesia ni Cristo* not only with African independent churches which Barrett (1968) and Sundkler (1961) describe, but also with the True Jesus Church and Assembly Hall Church in Taiwan (Swanson, 1970:171-219), the Spirit of Jesus Church in Japan (Braun, 1971:172-173), and the rapidly growing independent Pentecostal churches of Brazil and Chile (Read, Monterroso, Johnson, 1969, and Wagner, 1973).

Similarities with Other Independent Churches

Reaction to Mission

On the basis of his research Barrett concludes that African independency is a "societal reaction to mission" arising out of a feeling on the part of the people that Christian missions "were illegitimately mounting an attack against African traditional society and in particular its basic unit, the family" (1968:116). But when we study independency in the broader world-wide context, though clearly it appears still to be a reaction to mission, the underlying reason for the reaction does not seem to be an

assumed assault on the traditional family structure. For Barrett the whole complex of problems surrounding missions' attacks on African polygamy seems to dominate the analysis. Granting that polygamy in Africa is a powerful factor in producing independency there, a more fundamental factor even in Africa is the reaction to mission as a white man's enterprise tightly interlocked with Western colonialism. Sundkler saw the root cause for South African independency as "the color line between white and black" (1961:32). This is probably closer to the heart of the problem than the more distinctly African phenomenon of polygamy. The fact that of necessity Western Christians from the colonial powers pioneered the missionary advance into all of these Third World nations produced two results: first, strong mission churches were planted in almost every country as the direct fruit of their labors; but secondly, a reaction to Western missions set in and independent churches sprang up—and are still springing up—in most of these same countries. The specific factors differed in each situation, yet the underlying pattern is clear.

The story of the beginnings of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* illustrates this pattern in the Philippines. Protestant missions entered the Philippines in the aftermath of the American acquisition of the islands from Spain and enjoyed the benevolent approval of the new colonial authorities (see Tuggy, 1971:102). Early Protestant missions, partly as a result of the favorable situation (as well as because of the warm-hearted dedication of the first missionaries to evangelism and church planting), experienced great growth in their early years in the Philippines, especially in the greater Manila area. But nationalistic reactions did occur. The first notable one was the Zamora schism in the Methodist Church (see page 7). The *Iglesia ni Cristo* also began as a reaction to American missions. It was not purely that,

to be sure, but Felix Manalo's attitude toward American missionaries, such as Adams, as well as his dissatisfaction with the divided Protestantism which he saw, shows that reaction to American missions was indeed an important factor in the beginning of his movement. As a reaction to missions the *Iglesia ni Cristo* shows one of its greatest similarities to other Third World independent churches.

Independence and Separatism

By definition, of course, all independent churches share this characteristic. But the degree of independence or separateness varies. The Chilean Methodist Pentecostal Church is being wooed by the World Council of Churches and the Zairian Kimbanguist Church, as well as the *Eglise Harriste*, have become members of the same body. The Jesus Family movement recognized its debt to the China Inland Mission (now Overseas Missionary Fellowship) yet remained independent of it (Swanson, 1970:20). But other independent churches are radically and fiercely independent and separatistic. Often this separatism is based on a conviction that they are the only true Church. The Assembly Hall in Taiwan, for example, believes that the full recovery of the Gospel began with the birth of the Assembly movement in 1922 (Swanson, 1970:212). And we have already noted that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* believes that it is the true Church of Christ which reappeared in 1914 after many centuries of Roman captivity.

Charismatic Leadership

The emergence of a charismatic leader seems to be an indispensable ingredient for a successful independent church. A powerful Brazilian evangelist, Manuel de Melo, leads a "sky-rocketing" Brazil for Christ movement (Wagner,

1973:58). Watchman Nee and, more recently, Witness Lee have been powerful leaders in the Assembly Hall movement (Swanson, 1970:214). The Kimbanguists look back to Simon Kimbangu as their great prophet. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* follows the teachings of Felix Manalo whom they consider God's Last Messenger (see pages 37-39).

Sundkler found that in South Africa leaders of independent churches fell into two types which in turn corresponded to two types of churches which they led (1960:107-109). The first type of leader was the **chief-type**, a man gifted with leadership traits who had the prestige, bravery, and executive ability to lead his church ably in a white-dominated world. These chief-type leaders founded churches which Sundkler termed "Ethiopian" which separated from mission churches for primarily racial reasons. The other type of leader Sundkler called the **prophet-type** whose churches usually represented a syncretistic blend of traditional beliefs and Christianity and featured purification rites, taboos, faith-healing, and witch hunting. Sundkler calls these "Zionist" churches. While Sundkler's distinctions may accurately fit only the South African situation, yet the basic distinction between leaders which are oriented toward organization and those who stress "supernatural" manifestations seem to be important in the larger worldwide context of independency. Here again, more investigation is needed and may well lead to the conclusion that more than these two types of charismatic leaders exist. Felix Manalo himself seems to have shown some of the characteristics of both the "chief" (or "**cacique**") type of leader and the "prophet" type (but, probably, more of the former). In any case the *Iglesia ni Cristo* traces itself back to a charismatic leader and again shows its similarity to other independent churches around the world.

Distinctive Doctrinal Position and Bible Legitimation

Because independent churches usually see themselves in strong contrast with mission-connected churches, doctrinal differences are to be expected to a greater or lesser extent. And because the Bible has been such an important factor in their formation, it is not surprising to find that they often justify their separate existence on the basis of their interpretation of the Bible.⁶

The doctrine of the Trinity seems to be a special stumbling block to some of these churches, and the doctrine concerning their founder sometimes seem to overshadow the doctrine of Christ. Some Zionist sects of South Africa have identified their particular founder as a "Black Christ" (cf. Sundkler, 1960:278-289). The Spirit of Jesus Church in Japan does not affirm the Trinity, though it does teach the deity of Christ (Braun, 1971:173). The True Jesus Church in Taiwan teaches a modal trinity in which the one God chooses to reveal Himself in three distinct ways but does not exist as three distinct Persons (Swanson, 1970:185). Columbia's fastest growing church, the United Pentecostals, similarly will not affirm the Nicean Trinitarian formula (Wagner, 1973:37-39). The *Iglesia ni Cristo*, as we have previously explained, strongly denies the deity of Christ and has a well-developed doctrine of its founder as the Last Messenger of God.

Barrett points out that the independent churches' break with mission churches has forced them to seek their legitimation as churches in the Bible itself (1968:134). A favorite text in Africa has been Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." This may be compared with the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* use of Isaiah 43:5,6 (see page 115).

⁶ This is, of course, standard procedure for all churches. Luther, Calvin, George Fox and other church founders have done exactly this.

Indigeneity and Cultural Adaptation

As nationals lead their own churches completely independent of any foreign control or connection, these churches reflect quite accurately their indigenous cultural environments. Cultural adaptation can especially be observed in the leadership patterns of these independent churches. The fact that Sundkler could classify South African independent church leaders as either chief-type or prophet-type indicates that these churches used the leadership patterns of native Zulu Society. In the Philippines Felix Manalo fit the Filipino "cacique" image perfectly as he led his church.

Independent churches must meet the felt needs of the people they serve or they would not grow so rapidly. The growth of the Pentecostals in Brazil is due at least in part to the fact that "the Pentecostal worship pattern is in harmony with the cultural dynamics of the people" (Read, Monterroso, Johnson, 1969:316). The emphasis on the manifestations of the Holy Spirit also answers needs which drive many people in that country into Spiritism.

In chapter seven we studied the indigeneity of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in some detail. In its cultural adaptation it shows its affinity with many other independent churches around the world.

Conservatism

In his important book on the contemporary American Church scene, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, Dean Kelly (1972) expounds his thesis that while liberal, ecumenically minded denominations in the United States are losing members, many conservative, separatistic churches are continuing to grow, some quite rapidly. Admittedly,

the adjective "conservative" may not be applied very helpfully to some independent church movements, particularly in tribal situations. The word would have little meaning there. But in Latin America or in the Philippines or Taiwan, it is descriptive of much that we can observe in the independent churches that are growing in these countries.

A conservative church, according to Kelly, is one that is more concerned with "conserving the tried and true than exploring or experimenting with the new" (1971:147). It stresses ultimate meaning (in Christian terminology, talks about God and salvation) and does not get involved in "worldly" affairs. It makes demands on its members and expects their wholehearted commitment to its purposes. It is separatistic and shows the qualities of a "strong" religion which are summed up in the concept of strictness. These characteristics are highly visible in many independent churches overseas and, especially, in the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

Even on social issues the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has been conservative through the years. Its political stance has been very conservative and anti-communist. Its ministers have struck out against unions, long hair, mini-skirts, and other liberal innovations. Conservative church growth is not just an American phenomenon.

Rapid Growth

The last similarity to other independent churches we will mention (no doubt, others exist) is the pattern of rapid growth. Not that all independent churches grow rapidly for many stagnate and even die just as some mission churches do. But in many countries of the world most independent churches are growing faster than most mission related churches. A few examples will illustrate this fact. In Zaire the Kimbanguist Church which began in 1921 now num-

bers 200,000 communicant members while in South Africa the Independent Church of Christ, dating from 1921, now has 120,000 members; and the Zion Christian Church (1914) has a community of about 200,000 (Barrett, 1968:313-316). In Taiwan the Assembly Hall with about 35,000 members is about one half the size of the much older Presbyterian Church (which is the largest Protestant denomination on the island). The True Jesus Church, also in Taiwan, has about 28,000 members and in 1968 was growing at the rate of over eight percent per year, faster than any other church and almost three times the population growth (Swanson, 1970:223ff). Braun reports that the Spirit of Jesus Church in Japan had 436 members in 1948, and in 1964 had 46,870 (1970:172) — very good growth indeed in a country where most churches are growing only very slowly. In Chile by far the largest churches are the Independent Methodist Pentecostal Church with 141,000 communicant members (1967), and the Evangelical Pentecostal Church with 113,400 (1967) (Read, Monterroso, Johnson, 1969:104). In Brazil the largest independent church is Congregacao Crista with over 500,000 communicants. (The slightly mission-connected, though completely national-led church, the Brazilian Assemblies of God with over 1,400,000 communicants, is to be sure much larger.) (Read, Monterroso, Johnson, 1969:66-70)

Not only are independent churches proliferating in the world today; they are also often growing rapidly. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has shown this same vigorous growth pattern in the Philippines and now has over 300,000 baptized members, larger than any single Philippine Protestant denomination. Traditional churches cannot afford to ignore the independent church phenomenon.

Contrasts With Other Independent Church

Independent churches, like their mission church counterparts, reflect the cultural environment in which they are growing. They are also influenced by the personalities of their founders and by the basic principles on which they were built. These and other factors, particularly historical ones, cause independent churches to be dissimilar as well as similar. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is unique in many ways. It has its own "personality" which is best pointed up by describing some of the ways in which it differs with other churches. As we describe these contrasts we need to emphasize that in the final analysis the *Iglesia's* uniqueness actually lies in its particular combination of characteristics, not in any single feature which it may indeed share with another independent church somewhere else in the world. Let us look at some of these contrasts.

Pan Tribal Character

Barrett rightly emphasizes the tribal basis of African independency (1968:58ff). He admits that non-tribal factors play an important part in the growth of these movements but points out that they cannot explain "the extraordinary way in which movements attract certain tribes but fail to attract others immediately adjacent to them" (1969:59). In contrast the *Iglesia ni Cristo* should be conceived of as primarily a national, not a Tagalog phenomenon. Not to do so would be to commit the same error which some historians did who said that the Philippine revolution of 1896 was simply a "Tagalog affair" (cf. Tug-gy, 1971:84).

In its teaching the *Iglesia* has emphasized the Philippines as an island nation in the Far East. It has used the

Tagalog language but has thought of it as the **national** language, not as a "tribal" language. In its top leadership the *Iglesia* is not a strictly Tagalog organization. Among its Division Ministers men of different language groups and geographical areas are represented. Administrative Secretary Cipriano Sandoval, whose leading position in the *Iglesia* we have often noted, is an Ilocano, and is probably more fluent in English than in Tagalog. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is a Philippine-wide faith, not a regional one.

Political Involvement

As the *Iglesia ni Cristo* grew, it became increasingly involved in politics. We have already described this involvement in some detail (see pages 93ff). This overt political activity (though basically non-partisan) stands in sharp contrast with many (but far from all) independent churches which tend to be "other worldly" in their attitude. Troeltsch holds that free churches characteristically disdain world political activity. But the *Iglesia* is not afraid to plunge into the grimy world of politics. Politicians have been frequent visitors to the *Iglesia ni Cristo* palace. When Quezon City politicians gathered to make serious political decisions, Eraño Manalo was kept informed.

The *Iglesia's* political involvement is what caught the interest of the Japanese political scientist, Hirofumi Ando. It reminded him of the political activity of the Japanese Buddhist sect, *Sokka Gakkai*, so he approached the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as a religio-political movement. Ando, probably, over-estimated the importance of the political dimension of *Iglesia* life, but he did show that this was indeed a significant aspect of its character as a church and, probably, lay behind some of its growth in the troubled Central Luzon provinces.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo's* particular form of political activity with its powerful block-voting yet completely non-partisan involvement is probably unique in the world religious scene.

Central Place of the Bible—No "Inner Light"

The *Iglesia ni Cristo's* strong emphasis upon the Bible (as interpreted by Manalo) as its authority is not unique. Other independent churches, including the more evangelically oriented Assembly Hall of Taiwan and the Independent Pentecostals in Latin America, share this characteristic. However, it does stand in contrast with the great number of independent movements led by local "prophets" who claim special revelations through visions or other types of divine guidance. Even in his 1913 three-day closet experience, Felix Manalo claimed no supernatural revelation, though he claimed God's special leading as he wrote out his understandings of Bible teachings and his ideas of what should be the shape of the new church. For this reason Manalo, probably, should not be classified as simply a prophet-type leader because he never claimed new revelation through visions or any other esoteric means. He always asserted that his teaching was based on the literal words of Scripture. But along with some other founders of independent movements, he did claim special insight and special authority for interpreting the Bible which he said common members did not share.

Lack of Emphasis on Spirits and on Supernatural Manifestations

In his carefully researched work, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, Sundkler describes in great detail the ceremonies and activities which the "Zionist" type of indepen-

dent church in South Africa uses in dealing with sin, defilement, spirits, ancestor ghosts, and witches. He shows that confession and purification rites, and exorcism and witch finding are activities which loom large in the life of these churches. In contrast, traditional churches largely ignore these basic units of the traditional Zulu understanding of life and religion (1961:180-294). The "prophets" sense these felt needs and create a Christianity which meets them. Prophets often practice divine healing. In some of their churches speaking in tongues is practiced.

Popular religion in the Philippines, though the country is nominally Christian, has a strong animistic base. Belief in spirits abounds, and fear of witches (*aswang*) is instilled in children from the earliest age. Amulets or charms called *anting-anting* play an important part in the life of many Filipinos who attribute the saving of their lives to such items. Sickness has always been a primary concern in traditional Filipino religion which has given great emphasis to healing through herbs, magic and especially through the ministrations of noted faith healers, some of whom are now achieving international fame.

With this background, the popularity of certain syncretistic religions which cater to popular belief is not surprising. Once I traveled to San Fabian, Pangasinan to interview the leader of a rapidly growing syncretistic sect known as "The Crusaders of the Divine Church of Christ." When I entered his office I noticed a sign on his desk which read, "Monsignor Magliba: Supreme Pontiff and Divine Healer." During my short visit he was called out several times to treat believers, or better "patients."

What is surprising is that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* caters so very little to these aspects of the Filipino popular faith. True, *Pasugo* magazine recently featured a testimony of

a healing by Eraño Manalo (Magnabijon, 1972:29), but the *Iglesia* does not base its apologetic or appeal on such occurrences. Indeed, its founder, Felix Manalo, was troubled by a variety of illnesses throughout his life. The *Iglesia* has been almost rationalistic in its approach with its constant appeal to logic (of a sort) and the words of Scripture. It seeks to win converts by convincing them, not overpowering them by supernatural manifestations.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is definitely not charismatic in the modern, restricted sense of stressing the spiritual gifts listed in I Corinthians 12:28-31 (with special emphasis on speaking in tongues). The *Iglesia* does not have a highly developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit because it believes that the Holy Spirit is not a person in the Trinity but a power or force of God operating in the world. Though *Iglesia* members have reported seeing visions, they do not practice tongues speaking. *Iglesia* ministers pray for the sick but no "healing" meetings are held. Special revelations are not allowed, though Eraño Manalo may be inspired to make new interpretations of Scripture. Public weeping (usually subdued) during prayer is, apparently, the only physical manifestation which occurs in *Iglesia* services and this is interpreted as the Holy Spirit or the power of God coming upon them.

In this chapter we have considered the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as an outstanding example of the world-wide independent church phenomenon. It has much in common with other similar movements around the world but also exhibits its own unique characteristics. On the world-wide scene its significance is great, primarily, because of its size and wealth. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is the largest (non-mission related) independent church in Asia. It is about fifty percent larger than the Kimbanguist Church in Zaire, the

largest independent church in Africa, and about the same size as the *Congregacao Crista* in Brazil. Though the *Iglesia* does not see itself as part of a world-wide religious movement, other Christians should see it from the perspective of the world-wide independent church phenomenon and try to relate to it in this light. Although this means that its exclusivistic claims cannot be taken seriously, its existence as an independent church must be taken very seriously.

CHAPTER 10

ITS FUTURE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER CHURCHES

This investigation of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the Philippines has probed deeply into its history and teachings. We have sought to understand its distinguishing character and guiding beliefs and the dynamics of its propagation. We have described its particular Philippine-wide, as well as its more general world-wide environment. We have encountered its leading personalities. Now we want to draw these various lines of research together by asking some crucial concluding questions? Why has it grown the way it has in the past? What are its future prospects? What can other churches learn from it, both positively and negatively? And in a more personal vein, what is our own evaluation of this church and its founder based on the results of this investigation? These questions form the framework of this chapter.

Why Has It Grown?

No single reason accounts for the *Iglesia ni Cristo's* great growth—church growth is always more complicated than that. Rather a whole complex of causal factors lie behind this amazing growth. In the preceeding chapters we have sought to uncover these through a careful analysis of its history and methodology. In summarizing our findings, it will be helpful to list the historical, sociological, methodological, and religious factors involved.

Historical Factors

1. The American acquisition of the Philippines in 1898 shattered the Roman Catholic hegemony over the re-

ligious life of the lowland Filipinos. Religious pluralism became a reality in the Philippines.

2. American civil government, and later the Philippine government, strictly enforced religious liberty as a constitutional right.

3. Missionaries of many different Protestant denominations entering the Philippines at about the same time during the first decade of this century created a climate of religious competition, even though they tried to avoid this through the Evangelical Alliance.

4. The rise of nationalistic sentiments during the American rule reinforced the appeal of nationalistic religious groups such as the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

5. Superior attitudes of some American missionaries effected a reaction on the part of some Filipino leaders.

6. The adoption by the Commonwealth and ratification by the Philippine Republic of Tagalog as the basis for the national language gave it a prestige on which the *Iglesia* could capitalize.

7. Philippine independence in 1945 created an atmosphere which was quite congenial to the growth of completely national churches such as the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

8. A smooth transition of authority was made from Felix Manalo to his son, Eraño, upon the founder's death.

Sociological Factors

1. During both the period of American rule and since independence, Philippine society has been highly innovative in many areas of life. Religion has been one of the areas most affected, and much of the population has been responsive to advocates of religious change.

2. During this same period great internal migration has occurred in the Philippines. In recent years emigration to the United States and Canada has increased tremendously. The *Iglesia* has grown greatly along these lines of internal migration and is beginning to grow in the external too.

3. Felix Manalo, as an indigenous charismatic leader, fulfilled the image of a Filipino *cacique*-type leader. He was forceful, dogmatic, dispensed favors to produce loyalty, and was given to ostentatious display of wealth and power. He was a leader with whom the masses could identify as a man of the masses who "made good."

4. Agrarian unrest in the central provinces of Luzon and severe underemployment in the cities helped to bring the sympathies of poorer people to a church which was not identified with either the land-owners or the colonial power and which would help them in their land and labor problems.

5. *Iglesia* leaders understood the tendency of Philippine society to fragment so they set up a strong organization to prevent this.

6. Filipino in leadership, language, and life-style, the *Iglesia* was "at home" in the Filipino culture.

Methodological Factors

1. Dynamic leadership by the church head and his cabinet whose single-minded purpose was church growth and expansion.

2. Effective strategic deployment of trained ministers by a strongly centralized leadership, again, with the aim of church expansion.

3. A highly organized disciplined membership mobilized through a cell ("committee") system for mission and propagation of their church.

4. Aggressive use of public debates to gain a hearing and convince the listeners of the errors of those who opposed the *Iglesia* and of the truth of its message.

5. A centralized financial system which, when the mass base grew large enough, provided funds for both extensive propagation and construction of beautiful cathedral-chapels, as well as support for an adequate professional ministry.

6. A well-balanced use of both the principles of extensive and intensive propagation.

7. An image was built of having beautiful chapels, forceful ministers, orderly services, and dedicated members, all under completely Filipino leadership.

Religious Factors

1. Widespread disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church was reinforced by *Iglesia* propaganda.

2. Religious certainty was offered in the exclusivistic message that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* was the only true church.

3. The message was strongly church-centered and was specifically aimed to gain members.

4. Appealing to the Bible as its only authority strengthened its position among people who, though largely ignorant of the contents of the Bible, greatly respected it.

5. Its strictness and anti-ecumenical stand reinforced its hold on its members and strengthened its appeal to people who were looking for a religion that took itself seriously and demanded committed members.

6. Its rationalism appealed to Christians who had difficulty in accepting the doctrines of the Trinity, deity of Christ, and immortality of the soul, yet did not want the looseness and uncertainty of the liberalism.

Other reasons for *Iglesia* growth, undoubtedly, exist but those listed above are the chief ones. Church leaders of every denomination would do well to ponder these factors and, especially, to note that the *Iglesia* grew because it believed that this was its primary goal. So it unashamedly mobilized itself for rapid growth, sacrificially worked for it, and finally achieved it.

Will It Continue to Grow in the Future?

To reconstruct the past requires painstaking research and careful sifting of the facts; to predict the future requires an additional gift of prophecy which I do not claim to possess. However, by reflecting on recent trends and the current situation, we can make reasonable projections about the future which, although they are not predictions in the strict sense of the word, are indicative of what we may expect to happen. In this section we want to make some projections about the future of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, particularly concerning its future growth.

In the concluding portion of chapter eight we analyzed the growth pattern of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. We saw that it grew very well before the Second World War from a small sect to a medium-sized church, and then we saw it explode throughout the Philippines after the war growing into a large nation-wide church in a period of fifteen years. We also noted a slowdown in growth rate since 1960 due partly to the fact that no more provinces remained to be entered and partly due to a process of consolidating its gains through an expensive program of chapel building and organizational development.

The *Iglesia ni Cristo's* growth rate in the decade of the 1960's was 76 per cent, about twice the population growth rate of 35 percent. This means that about half

of the *Iglesia* growth during this period was biological growth, that is, from the natural increase of those already members.

Our projection of *Iglesia* growth for the immediate future is that it will continue to grow at least as fast as the population growth rate, and probably, about as fast as it did in the 1960's or almost 6 percent a year. This projection is based upon the fact that we do not see any dramatic changes in the growth pattern of the *Iglesia* during the past few years, either to speed up its growth rate or to slow it down. If it continues this rate it will number over 1,000,000 communicant members in A.D. 2000.

In making this projection a few negative observations should be made which may tend to point towards a further slowdown in rate, though not in absolute growth. The moves toward further consolidation of its work mark much of *Iglesia* activity. Large outdoor meetings are not being held as they were in the past. Building large chapels continues unabated. With the new headquarters building completed bureaucratization, probably, is increasing within the church as the charisma continues to be routinized, to use Weberian terms. The *Iglesia* sees its foreign mission in the United States and Canada as its great frontier for expansion and its growing edge. However, since most of its overseas members were already members before they emigrated, the actual percentage gain for their growth is, probably, minimal. The importance of their overseas mission should not be discounted though simply for this reason.

Another factor which should be mentioned when making a projection of *Iglesia* growth is the increasingly effective evangelistic and church planting efforts of evangelical Protestants in the Philippines. This is a comparatively recent development in many areas but it bodes well for evangel-

ical church growth in the 1970's. In the immediate post-War period through the 1950's aggressive Protestant evangelism was sadly lacking in many provincial and urban areas. In many places the *Iglesia* advanced in a religious vacuum. Smaller evangelical missions were beginning their work during that period but they were still too small for their influence to be felt. But today Evangelicals throughout the Philippines are multiplying churches at an increasing rate. In 1972 one Baptist denomination launched its **Operation 200** strategy for church multiplication in which it plans to grow from 31 churches in 1971 to 200 local churches by 1981. The first two years of the program have been marked by great success. One missionary says the denomination's success in the area where he serves has noticeably and negatively affected the growth of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. This Baptist church is also planting churches in new suburban housing developments around Manila and has noticed that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is not successfully entering these upper middle class areas. Likewise in Mindanao, Southern Baptist, Foursquare Gospel, and Christian and Missionary Alliance churches continue to multiply. Nationwide the Christ the Only Way Movement under the leadership of Nene Ramientos and Jim Montgomery of Overseas Crusades is succeeding in its purpose to mobilize the entire evangelical community, including those in the older Protestant churches such as the UCCP and the United Methodists, in a national strategy of continuing saturation evangelism. All these efforts do not necessarily mean that the *Iglesia* growth rate will decrease for often when one church grows, others do also. But the *Iglesia* is experiencing a degree of competition that it has not experienced before as it appeals for the allegiance of the masses. If some sensitive soul shall object to the concept of competition in this context, he might remember that an exclusivistic church, such as the *Iglesia*

ni Cristo will interpret any successful evangelistic effort by another church as competition and a threat to itself.

Another problem for the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is the continuing state of martial law. Though the present improvement in law and order is, probably, benefiting the *Iglesia* as it is other churches, yet martial law has had some adverse effects on the *Iglesia*. Martial law has greatly affected the *Iglesia's* ability to exert political influence since politics is virtually non-existent now in the Philippines. What effect this has had on its finances is uncertain because we do not know how much, if any, it benefited from its association with politicians in pre-martial law days. The balance of martial law's effect, probably, has been somewhat negative for the *Iglesia*.

Having pointed out some of these possible threats to continued rapid *Iglesia* growth, I must hasten to add that I know of no solid evidence of any actual weakening of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. It appears to be in an extremely healthy financial condition with banks reportedly paying premium interest on its huge deposits. No evidence of discord in the top ranks exists. No split is imminent. We have already noted the record number of ministers ordained in 1973 and Sandoval's list of *Iglesia* achievements over the last ten years (see page 98). Though its present rate of growth may not increase, neither is it likely to decrease dramatically. The *Iglesia* will probably retain its leading position for many years to come.

Lessons For Other Churches

Stereotypes Shattered

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* story abounds in important lessons for other churches, both within the Philippines and around the world. It exposes shallow oversimplifications

about church growth and shatters dearly-held stereotypes about national-led churches. How many missionaries, even in the Philippines, have doubted the ability of nationals to organize and govern their own church in an efficient and orderly manner? The *Iglesia ni Cristo* belies every assertion that nationals are incapable of operating their own church with their own personnel and depending only on their own finances. *Iglesia* worship services contrast favorably with many missionary conducted services, and its attentive audiences must be the envy of every preacher who has seen nodding heads in his congregation.

A missionary once remarked to me that he was sure that the *Iglesia* would eventually have to weaken because of its shaky doctrinal base and its very unscholarly principles of Biblical interpretation. A quick survey of independent churches and heretical sects, however, will show that doctrinal soundness is no guarantee of growth and that the lack of it is not necessarily a barrier to growth, even among educated people. The Mormon Church, for example, has many highly educated members, though its doctrinal and historical base is not particularly noted for its intellectual respectability. Actually, *Iglesia* doctrine is a much firmer structure than many of its opponents are ready to admit. It is not the first church, for example, to have denied the Trinity or even the deity of Christ. Its weak biblical exegesis is probably its most vulnerable point, but the *Iglesia* may find it possible to adjust some of its interpretations of Scripture in the face of criticisms (as it has seemed to have done in some instances in the past) and still retain its basic doctrinal position.

Another missionary wrote me, "Of course, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has grown well; it has the Devil on its side!" Without denying Satan's interest in deceiving people since

that is his nature, I feel uncomfortable with this line of reasoning because it appears to give the Devil an upper hand over the Holy Spirit who surely empowers faithful churches to grow. One of our basic themes in this study has been that the causes of growth of any religious movement are complex and can never be reduced to one factor. And another has been that other churches have much to learn from the *Iglesia* experience without taking over any of its obvious error. We should be careful never to blame our own lack of effectiveness on the Holy Spirit by using this type of defensive reasoning.

Lessons in Methodology

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* propagation methodology which we described in chapter eight is replete with vital lessons for other churches, especially for those working in the Philippines. Too often, Philippine evangelicals simply import American evangelistic programs and use them with a minimum of cultural adaptation. Some Filipino pastors, however, are beginning to see the value of adopting some of the *Iglesia* methodology which it has found so effective in the past. Holding nightly outdoor religious discussions concerning controversial issues and the use of home indoctrination courses are proving especially effective.

We have yet to produce an evangelical publication which is as effective as the *Pasugo* magazine in propagating the faith. Christian evangelistic literature often seems to miss the mark. It answers questions that people are not asking and fails to answer the questions they are asking. This is particularly true of translated materials. The *Iglesia* has been able to develop particularly prolific writers in Tagalog, a feat that Evangelicals have yet to emulate.

Oversimplifications Questioned

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* story raises serious questions regarding some popular oversimplifications concerning church growth around the world. The following ideas especially should be restudied in the light of *Iglesia ni Cristo* experience.

1. **House churches as an ideal situation.** The history of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* would appear to show that house churches may be a fine place to begin—but are a poor place to stop! The *Iglesia* began many of its early **locals** in homes and its first chapels were cheap and poorly constructed. But when it grew large enough to afford large beautiful cathedral-chapels, it did not hesitate to build them. Today in Tondo, Manila, for example, men look first at the aging Roman Catholic cathedral, and then they look **up** to the spires of the newly constructed modern *Iglesia ni Cristo* cathedral-chapel. The psychological impact of this on the masses of the people in this predominately Roman Catholic nation should not be underestimated.

Importantly, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* has not neglected home meetings since it has built its large chapels. Neither is the individual member lost in the mass because the *Iglesia* has been able to organize through the committee system in such a way that every member knows exactly where he belongs within the giant organization. So the *Iglesia* is able to capitalize on the power and excitement of a great number of people in its cathedral-chapels while at the same time give their members individual and family attention through home and committee meetings.

2. **Lay involvement as the key to church growth.** Our *Iglesia ni Cristo* case study does not disprove this church growth axiom but it does qualify it. *Iglesia* lay members

are involved, but under the strict supervision of the ministers. The *Iglesia* moves forward like an army, each member in his proper place and under recognized authority. This is not to defend its autocratic form of church government, but it does prove that church growth is not limited to churches which stress the rights, privileges and ministry of the individual members. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* is minister-oriented, but it also provides significant opportunities for lay leadership through its deacons, deaconesses, officers of KMP and Buklod, as well as in its committee structure. The *Iglesia* definitely depends on its laymen, but it mobilizes them under the authority of the church administration.

3. Pentecostal-type churches are growing better today than other churches. This is true in certain countries but not in all. Even in the countries where it is true, these churches are not necessarily growing because they stress the charismatic manifestations of tongues-speaking and healing. As we have already noted, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is a "non-charismatic" church but several factors which have contributed to its growth are, in fact, quite similar to some of the factors which have helped some Pentecostal churches grow. These include its appeal to the masses, total mobilization for propagation, apprentice-type training program, local congregations planting other congregations, following lines of responsiveness and migration, and relative non-involvement in direct social action (cf. Wagner, 1973). Some striking differences between Pentecostal churches and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* are the latter's lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit, lack of "Body Life" teaching (in terms of a stress on the spiritual gifts and members ministering spiritually to one another), no stress on divine healing, and formalistic services (which cannot be described as "fun" to attend). It may be significant that the *Iglesia* has been

able to achieve its great growth without the extensive splintering which has occurred among Pentecostals in the Philippines.

The above three examples suffice to warn us against making quick generalizations about reasons for church growth. We also should be forewarned that because something "works" for even the *Iglesia ni Cristo* it may not be successful when another church applies it in another situation.

A Lesson in Motivation

We have stressed several times that the *Iglesia ni Cristo* grows because it aims to grow, because this is the overriding passion in all of its activities. All its efforts are focused on expansion. Considering this point further we now want to draw two lessons, one positive, one negative.

The positive lesson is obvious. Churches, like people, probably will not hit something at which they are not aiming. If we believe that church growth is God's will, as McGavran has so persuasively argued it is (1970:15ff), then our churches must make it their aim to grow. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* has given us an example of a church which is wholly dedicated to this aim and has grown as a result.

But the *Iglesia ni Cristo* aims not only at its own growth but also at the destruction of all other churches. Here is the point at which a negative note must be strongly sounded. The growth of our own organization must not be our only aim. Our overriding concern must be for the glory of God and the establishment of His Kingdom. We must be sure that we are seeking God's will and working toward the triumph of His Gospel in all of the world through His universal Church. Membership growth is not in and of itself the ultimate aim. Truth is important after all.

If a church seems to grow better because it teaches error, this does not excuse the teaching of error. Could it be that the reason for the poverty of spiritual life among *Iglesia* members lies in this very point? Has the *Iglesia* sought its own aggrandizement while denying the power of the Gospel operating in the larger worldwide Church? Has it even glorified its founder to such an extent that it is denying Christ?

A Personal Evaluation

In Chapter three (pages 39 ff) we asked a question to which we must now return. Is the *Iglesia ni Cristo* really of God? Did He actually call Manalo to be His messenger? If we were writing simply a descriptive, phenomenological account of a religious movement, we would not have to answer these questions. But as Christians we must attempt definite answers.

Four possibilities face us. (1) Manalo was an intentional fraud, or (2) a self-deluded leader, or (3) he was called by God but was in some way disobedient, or (4) he was called by God and fulfilled his mission obediently. Primarily because of the *Iglesia's* serious doctrinal errors regarding the deity of Christ and the way of salvation, I cannot accept the fourth alternative that Manalo was an obedient servant of God. This feeling is reinforced by a personal disappointment in Felix Manalo as a person and spiritual leader.

The first hypothesis, probably, quite widely held in the Philippines, that Manalo was an intentional fraud seems to me unlikely because of Manalo's apparent steadfastness throughout his life in his conviction that he had a special mission from God. He exhibited this conviction strongly enough to build around him a faithful group of leaders,

most of whom have remained faithful to him, even after his death. His wife and children who surely knew his weaknesses have also remained faithful to his teachings.

So the choice narrows to the second or third possibilities. Either Felix Manalo was a self-deluded religious leader or he was genuinely called by God but—at least in some instances—departed from the truth through personal disobedience. I frankly do not feel able to make a judgment between these two options, and it is probably not mine to make. In the final analysis, to paraphrase a statement from *Pasugo* on a slightly different subject, probably, only God and Felix Manalo really know.

Whatever Felix Manalo's personal position before God actually was, we have to do today with a large church with nearly a half a million members. How should evangelical Christians relate to it? I have already suggested that first of all we consider it an independent church of the type which we see in many other parts of the world and not just as a heretical sect. It will not quickly disappear nor be wished away. In the Philippines we cannot ignore it for it forces itself on our attention.

As Christians concerned for the spiritual welfare of the members of this large church we must faithfully witness to them concerning the reality of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God's divine Son. We should share with them the reality of the indwelling Christ whose presence and power is our daily experience. Though we may experience their hostility at times, we should consistently relate to *Iglesia* members in love, so fulfilling the law of Christ.

The Bible remains the great common ground between the *Iglesia* and evangelical Christians. Both profess belief in an absolutely authoritative revelation of God in the Bible.

True, *Iglesia* members do not trust our use of the Bible but they do sometimes listen. We who believe in the power of God's Word in the heart of man should persevere in pressing it on their attention. Areas of agreement may helpfully be mentioned first, but then we may emphasize parts of the Bible which the *Iglesia* overlooks.

Finally, because of the tightly disciplined, hierarchical organizational structure of the *Iglesia*, every effort should be made to reach the top and share the claims of biblical truth with the leaders. *Iglesia* leaders are highly prestige-conscious, so official contacts made with them are better made by people in higher positions in the church. The *Iglesia* leaders seem to have great respect for Albert Sanders, an older, able UCCP scholar, who has been at Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines for many years and who has written on the *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Ecumenical leaders have sought to make contact with the *Iglesia* but have achieved only limited success. The *Iglesia* may actually prove to be more open to other churches which show some of the same traits of strictness in belief and discipline as it does. The *Iglesia* has explicitly rejected the ecumenical movement (see the August, 1972 issue of *Pasugo*) but it may listen to church leaders with a strong position on biblical authority.

Should evangelicals continue to meet the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in public debates? I feel that this may be good strategy, providing the debates are strictly conducted according to mutually agreed-upon rules, and providing that both of the debaters are able men and leaders in the churches they represent. Debates may initially prove to be the only viable form of dialogue with *Iglesia* leaders and should be entered into more for the opportunity they afford to enter into serious discussion with the leaders than for the

purpose of convincing listeners. Needless to say, the wording of the subjects debated should be carefully studied before agreeing to debate.

I, therefore, believe that our ultimate aim should be to help the *Iglesia* as a whole move to the more biblical and Christ-honoring position which their commitment to the Bible essentially entails. Individual members are seldom extricated from the church because they are quite resistant to preaching by other churches. No mass defection seems imminent. The most hopeful approach, dim as that hope may appear, is to work and pray earnestly for a change in the *Iglesia* as a whole under its recognized leadership.

My friend, Rogelio Baldemor, an able Filipino Baptist minister whose debating experience with the *Iglesia* was recounted in chapter eight, once was discussing some doctrinal issues with a small group of *Iglesia* workers. He told them, "Unbelievers often discuss controversial matters with an attitude of mutual respect, how much more should we who both believe the Bible."

I have written this book out of a deep respect for the *Iglesia ni Cristo* as an outstanding religious body in the Philippines. I pray that it will respond to it in the same spirit.

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IGLESIA NI CRISTO:
A Study in Independent Church Dynamics
Arthur Leonard Tuggy

This study seeks to discover the dynamics of the life and growth of a large, rapidly growing Third World independent church, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* in the Philippines.

To do this several lines of investigation are pursued. After briefly describing the general setting in which this church has grown, the historical development of the *Iglesia* is recounted in some detail: beginning with the religious quest of the founder, Felix Manalo, which finally led him to start his own religious organization. We trace the church's early expansion efforts radiating northward from Manila. We then see how after an early schism Manalo began to legitimate his mission through a special "God's Messenger" doctrine after which the movement regained its growth momentum and through a definite strategy of expansion, the *Iglesia* grew to become a significantly large church before the Second World War. Moving into an effective program of Philippine-wide growth after the War, the *Iglesia* became one of the leading churches in the Philippine ecclesiastical scene, making its influence felt even in the political arena. In tracing the history of its growth, we especially note the strategic factors which enabled it to grow as it did.

The next line of investigation portrays its distinctive doctrinal stand and the hermeneutics which it uses to undergird its position over against all other Christian churches. A special feature of this investigation is the tracing of some of its doctrinal antecedents in the doctrinal emphasis of the Disciples of Christ and the Seventh Day Adventists.

Making special use of Max Weber's model of charismatic leadership and its routinization, the *Iglesia's* organizational structure is analyzed from an historical perspective.

Trying then to see the *Iglesia* from the inside, we describe its life and ethos, especially focusing on its ethos as seen in its hymnody. To answer the question, "How indigenous is it?" we apply Kraft's model of dynamic equivalence churchness to the life of the *Iglesia ni Cristo*.

The methods of propagation and rhetoric which the *Iglesia* has used in its very effective expansion are analyzed and the underlying principles set forth.

Throughout this study the *Iglesia ni Cristo* is not considered as an isolated phenomenon, but as a representative independent church of the type Barrett has investigated in Africa. In chapter 9 its similarities and contrasts with other Third World independent churches are described.

In the concluding chapter, the reasons for *Iglesia* growth are summarized and a projection is made for its future expansion. Lessons for other churches are then drawn, and the study, which has been primarily phenomenological, concludes with a personal evaluation of the church and its founder.